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*The Way of
Truth*



Photograph by Angelo

Charles Fitch

The Way of Truth

by the Countess Béla Zichy



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THIS NARRATIVE
IS ADDRESSED IN ALL AFFECTION
TO MY SONS

ABASZÉPLAK,
August 19th, 1907.

NOTE

I must ask my readers to overlook the faulty construction and many errors displayed in this book, but I beg them most earnestly, not to regard it as a novel !

It is an account of my experiences, true in every detail, and possesses value and interest only as a human document.

• MABEL ZICHY.

BUDAPEST,

September 15th, 1925.

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Part I

THE PAST

THE WAY OF TRUTH

CHAPTER I

LAST night, as I sat late over my work at the old marquetry desk, in my little room, lighted only by the uncertain flare of a guttering candle, the thought occurred to me that, now that the chain of circumstances was all complete, I would write the story for you—but how shall I begin it ?

I know as little of the rules of composition as was imparted to me—a good many years ago now—at a fashionable school, and you to whom this narrative is addressed will readily remember that I had no natural talent as a story teller. For when the favourite books were laid aside as the light grew dim and someone on the hearthrug suggested telling “our own stories,” it was never I, but *you*, who told the tales in which, as knight or hero, you played a most intrepid part—killing strange monsters with your trusty sword, or rescuing lovely damsels in distress !

Now that my turn has come to tell a story—a story, also, of my own experiences—I can only

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tell it simply and awkwardly, as you would expect of me, and without daring or entertaining flights into the realms of fancy, for all that I have to relate you here *is true*. Yet truth, we know, is often stranger than fiction, and although you will be long past the age of interest in fairy lore when finally this meets your eyes and comprehension, I shall still speak of changes and transformation, of Prince Charming and of Captive Lady, brought to happiness after long wanderings and many adventures, by the spells of a great Magician.

Can I do better, therefore, in memory of the fireside hours when you told wonder-tales, or we read the old books of romance together, than begin my story thus :

ONCE UPON A TIME—several millions of years ago—two human souls, with which this narrative will have much to do, came one day into being. After having passed through all the innumerable elementary phases of evolution, psychic and physical, that lead to human life, Ahalya and Splendira, to give them their pseudonyms from the beginning, finally ascended through the équine race, and free and wild upon the primeval steppes they led a wandering life until they met death at last together, overtaken by the rigours of an arctic winter.

Thousands and thousands of years elapsed, and the two souls were making their way

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laboriously onward through a dreary succession of primitive human lives, passed, sometimes together and sometimes apart, until at length, after many generations of sore travail, of grinding toil and bitter experience, they had fitted themselves for a somewhat better order of existence and were born again to fill two different destinies in different parts of India.

I quote at this point from the notes given me on that last night by my old teacher and upon which this portion of the narrative is based, and here insert a few lines concerning the conditions to which the soul of the man, Splendira, had then attained. At this period . . . "He was an Indian—a noble—a pagan in religion, but a Christian in his acts. . . . He made his way ever onward and upward by his unfailing charity of purpose—and it is written 'the greatest of these is Charity'! . . . His star then set in India, to rise on another shore."

The soul of the woman, Ahalya, not having up to this time acquired any of the higher feminine virtues, had fallen behind her natural mate in the evolutionary order and was then incarnate as "an Indian woman of the people, a half-caste," with whom the noble, in passing, lingered for an hour upon his way. The son born of that hour—as you will presently learn from his own narrative—was only saved from death at his mother's hands by the secret intervention of her father.

The incident is sombre enough from every

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aspect, and the light which may, in knowledge of later events, be cast upon it relieves the gloom but slightly.

The man, attracted by her youth and beauty, found the woman fair, or he was drawn to her by the decree of their common fate, in a feeling of sudden sympathy ; while the girl in her turn experienced for him the highest and best sentiment of which her primitive nature was capable—an intense and passionate love. If they strayed through the flower-scented dusk of an Indian night together who was there to defend her from herself or the immemorial right of the noble . . . the seignior ?

We may believe that when at dawn Splendira rode away and was lost to Ahalya's sight down the dim vistas of that forest region where she then found a home, he left in her heart the undying memory of an hour's happiness, a hopeless and romantic passion for one who then, in every state, seemed far above her. That thereafter, for many months, she watched and waited for his promised return by way of her poor abode beneath the sundari trees, until at last, worn by the trial borne in poverty and depression of spirit, without means of subsistence for herself or for her child, she was roused to resentment of yet another burden laid upon her, and taking her sleeping boy, the guerdon of her unhappy love, to the shore of Ganges, there left him under cover of the darkness to be swept away by the rush of rising waters.

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I cannot but think that when she missed the little form from her arms and realised, if but dimly, how heinous was the crime she had committed, she gave way to despair, abandoned then a struggle too great for her slight strength, and herself, during what remained to her of existence, to any life that offered.

Splendira, richly clad, gallant in look and bearing, rode on to rejoin the martial band of comrades and retainers behind whom he had lingered on the way to some fierce tribal or frontier campaign in the course of which he perished; in the full vigour and flower of his youth, but as his brave soul desired. Amid the clash of arms, the fury of battle, undismayed and not knowing how to yield, with a last image before his dying eyes of the girl who shaded her eyes from the dawn as she watched him ride away, and the conviction in his heart that she had loved him.

The unhappy Ahalya, knowing nothing of his fate, "too poor" in health, endurance, and by all the circumstances of her wretched life, "to live well," drooped like a frail marsh flower amid the miseries of her surroundings and did not long survive.

New elements had, however, waked to being in the soul of Ahalya during her brief Indian incarnation, and the best of these was her first conception of a higher form of *love*. It is certain that when the crucial incident of her young life was past, suitors of a kind, in her own

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class, did not fail to seek the one upon whom a noble lord had looked with eyes of favour, but that the girl—bravely enough in view of her weakness—engaged in the unequal struggle with poverty and privation and tried, for three years' time at least, to keep her child honestly, and herself and her love from the contact of sin, in the slight hope of Splendira's return. By means of this moral effort, by the strength of her love, and the longing to be worthy of a place beside him, Ahalya raised herself at last to spiritual equality with Splendira, and by the ties of love and sympathy created during their transient Indian lives their souls were once again united.

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To the westward sped the souls of Ahalya and Splendira and in the phase that followed hard upon the life in India, they were cast at once into the proximity of one household and born brother and sister in the land of Egypt.

Amongst the numerous younger children of the Royal House, a new life dawned for them, although it was only in the distant and obscure apartments of the women of the Royal harem that they once more saw the light—if light it could be called.

As the children of slave mothers, or those of lowly origin, they received scant care and attention during their early years. They were playmates and little comrades from the first, however, as only a few months separated them

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in age, and they grew up side by side, bound by the strong, pure ties of childish affection.

Little, if any, instruction was bestowed upon them, although the women slaves as the amusement of their leisure hours taught the little girl to dance, and the children were left together to romp through long cloudless days in the majestic halls and courtyards of the palace or amid the tropical beauties of the brilliant gardens.

There, bosomed on the placid surface of pool or basin where mirrored lay the matchless colour of the Egyptian sky above, white and rosy lotus lilies floated, and there one day, eluding the slight vigilance of idle Nubian attendants, Ahalya and Splendira were pulling in wanton mischief, the sacred flowers from the basin when they were surprised by a brother, many years their senior, who had in his turn become the Pharaoh, as Seti-Menephtah.

The culprits, awed, alarmed, by the approach of the stately person of the Pharaoh, stood abashed beside the fountain, with eyes down-cast, but the brown hands of the little girl still clasped a dripping lotus lily. Glancing up in fear, catching the grave dark eyes, and wishing to appease, she stepped forward impulsively and offered Menephtah the flower!

Amused by this naughty pair, and attracted by their striking common likeness to the father of their race, Menephtah took them in his mercy, and to his care and affection they later

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owed all the fortunate circumstances of their lives. He caused the two children to be removed from the sordid conditions of their inner, or home surroundings, and their education was begun.

All instruction was at that time deeply coloured by the profound religious feeling with which the whole race of the Egyptians was actually impregnated. Youths of the higher classes received instruction from the priests, or at the priestly college founded by Seti the elder, grandfather of Menephtah, and there the boy, Splendira, was sent to pass some years in learning. Later, upon emerging, he became proficient in the use of arms, the arts of war and of the chase.

The little girl was brought to the notice of the first Queen of Menephtah, a kind, dark-faced woman no longer young, to whom she became handmaiden, and as a member of the Royal household was instructed in various feminine arts and accomplishments, as well as in the scrupulous care of her person and attention to dress and ornament. The first Queen, by her rank, held high place in the Temple, and there also the girl assisted her in service.

Several years passed: the boy, grown to man's estate, was eighteen years of age—Ahalya was a few months younger—when the love they had borne each other through childhood and later, throughout their youth, despite the separation of adolescent years, deepened to a stronger

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passion. As the bond of blood was considered no obstacle to a closer tie, they 'sought the sanction of the Pharaoh to their union, and he, perceiving that their love was great, caused them to be wedded before him in accordance with the rites and ceremonies of the time.

Once again on earth a son was born of the union of Ahalya and Splendira, the child—adored by his parents—who became in time a favourite and plaything of the Pharaoh, and was gifted with beauty, and a joyous and devoted nature.

I look back from this point to recall the three stories of Egypt written “under control” during the first period of my instruction. They were entitled *The Secret of Hatasu*, *The Secret of Seti's Lotus Flower*, and *The Secret of Meneptah*, and it was from these stories, or romances, as I then supposed them to be, that I came, as knowledge grew, to understand many things. The writing of the Secrets was accompanied by strange waking dreams or *visions*, and when at the end of a certain period I was directed to destroy the stories together with other papers and manuscripts, I did so with deep regret, for I had found them of absorbing interest, although it was only later that I was able to identify the figures so clearly described and sometimes made visible to me.

From memory of the first of the three stories, *The Secret of Hatasu*, I have drawn the facts, briefly outlined above, concerning the early lives

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in Egypt of Ahalya and Splendira. In the course of writing I "saw" the incident of the meeting of the Pharaoh and the children beside the lotus pool, and later when engaged upon the portion that related to Ahalya—or Hatasu, as she was then called—while in attendance upon the first Queen, I was visited by another vision.

I saw . . . the dim inner sanctuary of a temple, where on a dais, stood a carved stone statue of Isis, the All-Mother. Upon her head was set the symbolic horned crown bearing a sun-disc in the centre, and clasped in her hands were the emblems of "life" and "Striving Against Evil." Near the feet of the goddess at either side were grouped figures and objects of insignificant size, "attributes" of Isis, symbols, such as golden jars and baskets, statuettes of fertility, represented as a heifer, and of dog-headed Anubis.

Moving slowly from the left came two figures into view: the first a white-draped woman, dark-eyed, black-haired, no longer young and stoutly built, yet still of majestic mien. Behind, and slightly to her right, was the young girl of the earlier visions, Hatasu, older now, slim and erect, bearing in her arms a large but gracefully shaped amphora. She wore a thin, white tunic, reaching to the ankles, and her bare breast rose and fell beneath a broad necklace of golden beads and pendants. Gold bands were on the arms and wrists, and the full black hair—still worn as before—was bound by a

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golden fillet : in this a single lotus-bud was fixed above the brows.

Before the dais the older woman paused, and turning to the statue of the All-Mother, raised her hands as if in prayer. She stood thus for a few moments, then the girl stepped forward, stooped, lowered her amphora, and—although the backs of both figures were now turned to me—I knew that she made libation to the goddess. She stepped back then into her place ; the older woman turned also, and slowly, in order as they had come, they passed on to the right and out of sight.

A minute passed, and in that minute how many thousand years ?

Now from the right appeared a woman, a modern figure moving briskly, wearing a white gown and flower-trimmed garden hat, and leading by the hand a little lad about eight years old. •

The scene had not changed ; the statue of the goddess and the images grouped at her feet on either side, all stood unmoved in their places, yet with the appearance of the new figures a look grim and dusty, as of remotest antiquity, had settled upon the place. One might now have thought the scene to represent the visit of a modern woman and her son to a dim recess in the halls of some museum. This woman, too, paused before the dais and the statue of Isis, and bending forward, with one arm thrown round the child's shoulders, began to point out

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to him one by one, the statuettes and other small objects displayed before them. Her back was also turned to me, but I thought the figure seemed familiar.

While the woman was thus engaged with the child, a faint glow, as of dawning life, was seen little by little to tremble through the carven limbs of the statue of Isis. The great eyes brightened, glowed, brighter and brighter grew the radiance—it was unearthly! The child, alarmed, turned to his mother and grasped the skirt of her white gown.

A light as of the sun now shone from the disc set in the horned crown of Isis, the statue breathed, became sentient, glorified by a beauty not for human eyes. The woman, to reassure the frightened child, knelt and clasped her arms about him. Then Isis, the All-Mother, rose transfigured, towering to a height that was more than mortal, made one step forward, stretched forth her arm, and with the strange symbol clasped in her left hand touched the kneeling woman on the forehead.

My head fell forward heavily, my eyes drooped: I raised them by an effort, but the vision was gone.

CHAPTER II

FROM the second story in order, *The Secret of Seti's Lotus Flower*, I learned of the happy life and circumstances of Ahalya and Splendira from the time of their marriage. As a story it was the brightest and most delightful of the three, one that I greatly enjoyed writing, and loved to reread, for peace and happiness breathed through the lines.

It was in the course of writing this favourite story that I first saw the vision destined to persist over all the others. As the only one appearing on several occasions, recurring as it did at intervals during quite a long period, it became at last impressed upon my mind to the smallest detail.

Upon a low couch of archaic form, at one side or end of a small arras-hung room, I saw the seated figure of a young man. His years might have been three or four and twenty, and his handsome face with its strong regular features was at first, and always, a singularly visible or luminous point in the picture. The hair, illumined also by the same strange radiance, was of a soft and most unusual shade of dusky

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brown, and still worn as when, in a previous vision, I had seen the same young man a child, standing shamefaced beside the lotus pool. The straight, full locks fell on either side of the face, which they partly shaded, and were cut in a straight line at the neck.

The dress by its scantiness I perceived to be Egyptian, but it was never clearly distinguishable in form or colour by reason of the young man's attitude, which was on all occasions the same. With elbows resting upon knees, and chin on hands, he sat absorbed in watching a lovely child, a boy perhaps three years old, who played at his feet upon the floor. His eyes being thus cast down were hidden from me, but I felt sure they must be dark.

In a chair drawn near one end of the couch was a white-clad woman, who also turned a smiling face upon the child.

The young man's lithe and distinguished figure and handsome face, as well as the somewhat obscure interior scene in which the vision was set, were typically Egyptian in character, but the white-clad woman oddly resembled the modern figure seen in my vision of the Temple of Isis, while the boy—a veritable dream-child in loveliness—had rosy cheeks and golden curls, and was dressed as any modern baby might be!

Despite these evident anachronisms there was much in the two stories, *The Secret of the Lotus Flower* and *The Secret of Menephtah*, about the

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child Mena, as he grew older, interwoven with many details concerning the lives and personalities of the other figures seen in my visions.

Amongst the characters of the former story was the "*Captive of Rank*", occasional references to whom provided the single dark thread of tragedy that ran through the tale. But this I thought was only added to accentuate the happier colours that otherwise prevailed.

The *Captive of Rank*, was a dark-browed young man of some Asiatic race, who had been pressed into service at the court of the Pharaoh as attendant, and whose duty in that capacity it became—in the words of the story—"to stand behind the chair of the Lady Hatasu".

Presuming upon the rank which despite his state of captivity still gave him certain privileges, and the opportunities of his position in attendance, the *Captive* sought always to press upon Hatasu his passionate appeals and declarations of love.

It is clear that the girl was not innocent of fault in this matter. Her moral sense was still in an early and undeveloped phase, the novelty of the situation interested and amused her—probably by her attitude she actually encouraged it—but wearying at last of the man's infatuation, a persistence she had lost the power to check, she went to the Pharaoh, told him all, and begged that this man might be removed from her proximity. And—"the *Captive of Rank*

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was never again seen to stand behind the chair of the Lady Hatasu ”.

It is unnecessary, however, to follow the story of the life in Egypt of Ahalya and Splendira. Their material circumstances were very bright, their interests, occupations and amusements, those of their day and class. It was a period granted to Splendira for atonement, to Ahalya of repose and love in ease, and both were unquestionably happy. •

Then came a time when their joy was overcast, the even current of their lives disturbed by the incidents connected with the Hebrew troubles.

At this point began *The Secret of Menephtah*, the last, as well as the most sombre, of the tales. It opened with the words : “ Seti¹ stood on the great pylon overlooking the river and watched the bloated bodies of his subjects floating past.” Grim, dark-faced attendants stood at a distance ; Seti the Pharaoh mused alone, gazing out from under drawn brows upon the scene before him.

The blue sky of Egypt was obscured, great rolling clouds of black hung overhead ; beneath, the swollen, muddy waters of the Nile flowed sullenly, and borne upon their surface, whirling grotesquely, horribly, past, were dark, shapeless, awful forms !

¹ In the three “ Secrets ” the name, for the sake of brevity no doubt, was given as “ Seti ” only, but *Menephtah* was always to be understood.

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The curse of pestilence lay upon the land, a frightful plague brought by the filthy habits of the tribes termed by the Egyptians "lepers" and "outcasts".

A strict quarantine of the Jews in their own camps and quarters, where first the plague had broken out, had not sufficed to stem the malady. The season was unfavourable, the inundation imminent; when it came the people of Egypt were dying by thousands. Unable to embalm, and fearing even to entomb, their dead, the living cast the corpses into the river to be borne away and out of sight. Seti, gazing out upon the waters, knew that when they again subsided the fertile fields of Egypt would be sown with putrifying masses of corruption. "Then", so the story continued, "God said: 'the heart of the Pharaoh shall *not* be turned to water within him', and the decision was taken, 'the Hebrews must go forth!'"

Now came the call to arms! The hosts of the Pharaoh gathered and under his leadership went out; *not*, as we have been instructed during many generations, to perish miserably in the waters of the Red Sea, but to succeed, although with heavy losses, in driving the pestilential alien from the land. Amongst those who fell was Splendira, and thus Ahalya again lost the one who was on earth the nearest and most dear to her.

Yet Terror stalked abroad! Eviction had only cleansed the country of the cause of the

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misfortune—the dreadful scourge persisted, ravaging the land !

Ahalya in her misery sickened, fell a victim, and torn from her child, died in her turn, horribly, of the plague. The Kā of Ahalya, wrested thus prematurely from its habitation, went out upon its way, bearing and nursing, through centuries of lives, an ineradicable hatred of the race it ever deemed the cause of its afflictions.

Mena, the boy of Ahalya's heart, still but a child, was left alone, yet not fatherless, for Seti cherished him until his own end.

I well remember the lines describing the last hours of the Pharaoh, for thus *The Secret of Menephtah* was brought to a close. "Seti was an old man, when he died, and as he felt his end draw near he directed that he should be borne into the Temple. In the Sanctuary, before his Gods, he sat, and with the boy's hand in his, awaited death, and Seti counted the hours and spoke not, for seven hours, until he died". When the priests and attendants at length drew near, "the soul of the Pharaoh had been set free, but the boy, who sat at his feet, slept, with his head on the dead King's knees, and his hand still clasped in his."

Here ended *The Secret of Menephtah* as well as the story of the life in Egypt of Ahalya, Splendira, and Mena, the boy. Perhaps—who knows?—the lives of these three may somewhere be set forth, their carven and painted figures

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stand arrayed with the others that line the walls of some great dim tomb or mortuary chapel, offering love and homage to their deity, their King and kinsman, Mene-Phtah, Son of the Sun, King of the Upper and Lower Nile !

Part II
THE PRESENT

CHAPTER I

ALTHOUGH my particular beliefs have long been too personal a matter ever to be lightly submitted to discussion or ridicule, I have, nevertheless, occasionally related the story of my Egyptian visitant, only to avoid a more comprehensive answer to the question, "Have you ever seen anything?" so often asked when the conversation turns upon the subject of the "supernatural".

Several of my friends have heard, therefore, of this experience which occurred on board the steamer at Luxor, in the course of my journey up the Nile in the winter of 1893.

But that you may never suppose the events of the day to have led by some train of thought or association to the apparition of the night, I will tell you exactly what the events and impressions of that day were, and let you judge if there were any sequence.

The day began badly; my travelling companion who—for a then obscure reason—detested Egypt, and was possessed of the "Nile devil" from the moment that we set foot on the steamer, arose in an execrable

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humour and maintained a gloomy and forbidding silence during breakfast, the descent into the small boats, even through the subsequent adventure of being carried ashore by the thin-limbed Arabs—an experience that wrung expressions of liveliest alarm from most of us !

In the scramble for donkeys that ensued upon our being set down on the West bank, I was left to fend for myself, as usual, and being outclassed in the scrimmage, was flung in the end, by a pock-marked donkey-boy, on to the back of a lean, leggy beast with a wicked eye, that no one had been willing to mount. After our first halt this little brute bolted with me, and leaving the party and his attendant boy far in the rear, fled, at a mad gallop into the desert !

My hat-pins and hairpins soon flew to right and left, and my pretty, shabby, French hat was blown away. Like a feminine Gilpin I pursued a headlong course, hatless, only more fortunate in that I wore my own hair, which was streaming, a tangled yellow mane, behind me ! Luckily my mount followed a line familiar to himself through this rugged and desolate region, for we finally brought up at the Tombs of the Kings. I had a long wait, with the dragomans and ship attendants who had gone on in advance, before the rest of the party ambled up in dignified order, headed by the young Frenchman who had gallantly rescued

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my wandering *chapeau*—in a shape never devised by the Maison Virot.

Several ladies having amiably contributed such hairpins as they could spare, I twisted up my disordered locks, crowned the crazy erection with my misshapen hat, and proceeded to the sight-seeing.

There is no more interesting experience, in the whole course of the Nile journey, than this excursion to the “Valley of the Kings”, and I had long looked forward to the day as fixed by our itinerary. We visited all the tombs then open for inspection, and lastly, in that of Seti-Menephtah, called “Of the Exodus”, lingered for a moment in the sculptured funeral chamber, awed to brief silence by the suggestions of immense antiquity—although my impressions here, as elsewhere in Egypt, were greatly marred by the proximity of my fellow tourists. Upon this occasion, which should have been one appealing to the sentimental instincts of the traveller, we were, as always, accompanied by the “idiot boy” of the party, a youth of British origin, who stood forth undismayed in all places, to ask questions and to make remarks which for cheerful imbecility would have warmed the heart of Mark Twain. While this undoubtedly added an element of gaiety to our daily excursions it was fatal to any serious consideration of the monuments or places visited.

Inspired by his opportunities, the boy that

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day surpassed himself ; but although—on being appealed to—I made a point of rising, time and again to appreciation of “ the idiot’s latest ” I grew irritable under the strain, and thoroughly annoyed at last to find myself descending with a chattering band of tourists and sharing in the general outburst of foolish laughter, to the solemn last resting-place of that picturesque character of Hebrew ancient history—the Pharaoh of the Exodus. I was by no means sufficiently gifted with humour to feel that I had not been once again defrauded of the finer emotions for which I had come prepared.

True, a hush fell upon me as we stood deep in the gloom of the great sepulchre, and, for a moment, I felt as if the mystic atmosphere of that dim and haunted place had cast some strange spell upon me, but the impression was, alas, shortlived. We emerged into the glare of sun and sand to lunch at the mouth of the tomb seated at haphazard upon the boxes in which our food had been conveyed, and as usual upon such occasions, the “ tinned butter ” played a time-honoured part, not only as subject of comment to the facetious members of the party, but by the effect of its own unmistakable quality as well !

When the feast was over and the flow of soul had subsided we started off on foot to cross the bluff that rises between the tombs on the one side and the ruined Temple of Amon, then in course of excavation at Dêr-el-bahrî, on the

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other, and there, very hot and dusty from the jaunt, mounted the donkeys that awaited us and returned slowly to the point at which we had disembarked in the morning on crossing from the East bank of the Nile.

As a cavalcade we presented to the eye a series of subjects for the pencil of a Caran d'Ache, from the tiny Frenchman, perched upon his donkey like a monkey, to the gigantic grand duke, *incognito*, who had joined our party for the day and whose feet were only prevented by an effort from trailing along the ground as he rode. Later, when the Arabs in returning us to the boats were overpowered by his weight and dropped His Imperial Highness—amid shrieks of laughter—into the waters of the Nile, causing a premature inundation along the banks, I reminded myself with a shrug that this was “doing Egypt”, and once on board the steamer hurried off to my cabin in no very exalted frame of mind.

I must not, however, omit to mention at this point that since the previous day I had been much preoccupied and under the impression of a letter received with others on the arrival of the steamer at Luxor. It brought me the story of a highly complex love affair in which a friend of mine had become involved and, for the time at least, diverted my hitherto single-minded interest from the experiences of the Nile journey to the effort of working out a difficult moral problem upon which, consciously

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or subconsciously, I was not infrequently engaged.

The question I had set myself to answer was briefly this : " To what extent is a woman justified in resenting the deliberate thwarting of those hopes of her nature said to be the highest, and the most holy ? " And the contents of the letter, by a somewhat remote connection of ideas had suggested, for the first time to my mind, a desperate solution.

Without religious belief of any kind, despite a puritanical uprearing, not impelled to admiration of high ideals, thoughts or principles, by the intimate associations of my life at the time, I had only been restrained from professing absolute atheism by the strange and awful remembrance of my soul's projection into this world of sorrow, an impression too vivid, lasting and *true*, as I felt in every fibre, ever to be forgotten or to admit of being explained away. Subject to the perverse and cynical influence of one who took pleasure in destroying every happy or natural impulse in the soul of the woman placed by a difference of age and other circumstances in his charge, as well as in his power, I clung desperately to the conviction that to " follow Nature " did not mean, as he believed, to sink into a revolting materialism, but to find through one's love for her the way to Nature's confidence and perhaps, at last, to the knowledge of her secrets. My moral sense had become debased to the point

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of admitting every possibility except the perversion of the natural laws, and it was my wish to remain true to this idea at least, as representing the only form of faith I had, the only cult that I was able to understand.

The solution, then, of the problem reached at the close of a day upon which I had unwittingly accomplished what would, in knowledge, have been a pious pilgrimage to me, was crudely this : “ ‘ An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth ’ , is an elemental law and therefore, crime for crime ! It is woman’s right to bear children. . . . I will find mine ! ”

Little did I realise when I went below to my cabin for the night that with the framing of this dangerous decision I had reached a long predestined moment in my existence, one toward which the unhappy circumstances of my present life had long been working, nor that by means of a desperate cry that issued less from the depths of a profound cynicism than from a long desolate mother-heart, I was to summon an unearthly visitant.

I retired about ten o’clock, tired out by the day’s exertions, and being young and in good health, soon put my preoccupations aside and fell into a profound and peaceful sleep.

Toward morning I awoke with a violent start, and the impression that can only be described as a “ feeling that something had opened in my brain ”. The faint light of earliest dawn already pervaded the cabin—

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the whole interior in all its various details was clearly visible to me—and standing beside my berth I was dismayed to see the tall figure of an unknown man dressed in a long closely-fitting brownish garment, and wearing an odd high turban or head-dress.

The position of this figure was so unusual as instantly to arrest my attention ; the upper part of the body was bent slightly forward, the arms upraised to their full length, the hands upraised also with palms turned forward and fingers extended. Framed by the upraised arms I distinctly saw a smooth, dark-skinned, oval, face with straight, regular features, and extraordinarily large and brilliant eyes !

For a moment I observed these things, appalled at the sight, smitten to utter terror by the gleam of the great eyes, yet never doubting that it was the figure of a living man ! Then, assuming, despite obvious differences of costume and appearance which I was far too agitated to consider, that one of the shore Arabs—of whom I had heard many unpleasant tales in the course of my journey—had by some means managed to break into the cabin, I was seized with panic, lost all control of my nerves and began to scream. The awful shrieks I uttered, six or seven in number, reverberated through and through the silent steamer adding greatly to my own distress !

Meanwhile the apparition, which was intensely real and visible, dissolved slowly before

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my horrified eyes, and presently my travelling companion came to take its place by my side, but fully an hour elapsed before my heart resumed a normal action, and I was restored to calm and sleep.

On the following day I learned from ship-board gossip that in the early hours of the morning frightful screams had been heard by all on board, and that the doctor, who believed one of the Arabs to be murdering his wife, as not infrequently happened, had dressed hastily and gone ashore to investigate, while the doctor of a rival steamer moored at some distance from ours, had also heard my shrieks and, moved by the same fear, gone to ascertain their cause.

As I was not subject to "dreams", good or bad, at the time, and certainly not to screaming in my sleep, I was greatly annoyed and mortified by the occurrence and took care not to mention the fact that I had been the cause of a disturbance that remained a mystery to all on board—and most of all to me !

I had no other similar experiences during my travels in Egypt. Stopping, however, in Cairo on my return from the Nile journey, I found the opportunity I had previously missed of visiting the museum. There, in a great glass case or coffin, with wrappings disordered and his noble face bared in its decay to the gaze of the tourist multitude, lies Rameses, the Great. As I stood beside his mummied form, a sudden wave of love and veneration swept over me,

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and I—to whom such pious impulses were certainly most foreign—felt that I must fall upon my knees and pray!

I seemed indeed, during my stay in Egypt, to recover the devotional sense that previously in this life, I had so particularly lacked. Reading and thinking amid the suggestive surroundings of the interesting, symbolic Nature worship probably led to the recollection—if not to a positive revival—of the old religious sentiment.

Having lived through an all-too-brief halcyon time in ancient Egypt at a period in my soul's history when I was young and impressionable and when religion played a most vital part in the life of all classes, there is little doubt but that I had been imbued with the popular veneration for the divine Isis. Even as an insignificant female member of the royal household I must have heard of Theurgy, and the Inner Mysteries, and it is possible that having been admitted to perform certain services in the temple, I had myself received instruction such as was not generally bestowed upon the ordinary worshipper.

I found, then, after centuries of absence, great relaxation from my actual unhappiness in the study of Egypt, her monuments, and her ancient faith. It was the one subject to which I could bring a little more than superficial knowledge, due to an unflagging, if at the time, wholly inexplicable, childish interest in "everything Egyptian".

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I had always wished intensely to visit the country, and there felt almost the joy of one returned to the scenes of a happy childhood. Later, when many things became clear to me, I realised that my impressions of a certain sense of youth and exhilaration, never in reality experienced by me in this life, were also memories associated with my old longing for Egypt—the longing lulled to a vague sense of peace by my visit to scenes which, although dimly, were often strangely, familiar. For youth and age are of the *soul* more truly than of the transient body, and in that happy phase of my existence passed so long since in Egypt I ~~was~~ still young in spirit. However grave may have been my defects I was not consciously oppressed by their weight, and my heart still sang for the joy of living.

CHAPTER III

WE returned from our travels in Egypt by way of Greece to Paris, and after a hectic six weeks, spent chiefly in the fashionable restaurants and the Rue de la Paix, continued on our way to England. We remained for a short season in London, paid a few week-end visits, and having finished our shopping, sailed in July for America, proceeding at once upon arrival to Newport, there to resume the usual order of our existence.

The summer slipped quickly by in one continuous round of gaiety, the presence of visiting Royalty adding that year an unaccustomed lustre to the season. I had not a moment's time in the rush to devote to reading nor to serious reflections of any kind—to be frank I did not seek it—and although I was occasionally moved to philosophise, or to lament the futility of our existence to such of my friends as cared for the turn of conversation, this too was but seldom.

Once only, on returning at dawn from a wonderful ball, the last of a season of which it was pronounced the *clou*, I was moved by the

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beauty of the early morning to write, and sitting at my dressing-table scribbled the following lines on the back of an envelope torn from the invitation I had picked up on passing through the hall.

“ AN AWAKENING ”

“ Clad in a ball gown, with a bit of lace about my shoulders, I walked with another to meet the sunrise. The pure, fresh breeze that sweeps through the world before its waking, blew full in our faces from the sea, the golden light of a glorious dawn was in our eyes—we turned to each other with a deep breath and said “I love you ! ”

As the one and only intellectual effort of my summer, and not inspired by any actual or even similar incident, it appeared under my hand as a complete surprise to me, the more so as I seemed vaguely conscious while I wrote that my tired brain had not produced it. This happened—rather oddly, I thought—on my birthday ; the last day of August, as well as of a summer in Newport which was, in spite of the insistent minor note, one of the happiest of my present life. I had been at home, in the sense of occupying a hired cottage, and memories of that season will always be dear to me because of the sympathy and affection shown me by many friends.

Early in September we left Newport to pay

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the autumnal round of country-house visits, and after an interval of a few weeks at the Tuxedo Club, returned to New York.

It had by this time become apparent to my friends, as it had long been to me, that he to whom I have elsewhere referred as my "traveling companion", and I, were a sadly ill-assorted pair. Cast by the exigencies of our destiny into friendly relations by the mis-directed kindness of common friends, I had been led to accept their version of the circumstances attending his first marriage and its unfortunate termination, and to find pleasure in the thought that I might make amends. It would not be right to say that I experienced a great love for the man, nearly twenty years my senior, but I had already seen four crowded seasons without being touched by the "tender passion" to which I believed myself, by my temperament, to be quite unlikely ever to succumb.

At least in return for the advantages offered me, I brought to the sacrificial altar, pity for one who had been, as I believed, misunderstood, serious intentions and good-will.

From the point of leaving the unconscious years of childhood, happy always but for their loneliness, my life had not been free from serious anxieties. My father—the very kindest in the world—was in every sense a true artist and preferred, in accordance with his tastes, the easy, careless life of studios and

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artistic associations that was infinitely distasteful to my mother's New England sense of conventionality and order. Our life, therefore, was marred by want of harmony, and always by reason of the serious illness from which my dear mother suffered during many years.

As a personal compensation a considerable success attended my *début* in society, but although I should not be frank in not admitting this to have been a source of gratification to me, I very soon realised that the rôle of "beauty" was one for which I had no particular aptitude. I was too simple and direct to be either a snob or "toady", and to "get on" by pushing, climbing, or making use of my friends was repugnant to my whole nature. After four years of experience, I had become more than slightly disillusioned as to an entirely fashionable existence, aided by my mother who, as a Bostonian and a Woodbury, disapproved, in a general way, of the famous Four Hundred and feared that all my better impulses would be lost in the love of excitement and quest of continual amusement.

Although I knew that my devoted and most indulgent parents, united always in the affection they gave their one child, never harboured the thought, a time came when I felt myself to be too heavy a burden upon the slender resources of the family. A great effort had been made to send me to the best—or most fashionable—schools of New York, in accordance with my

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mother's wish and hope, unhappily vain, of educating me to her own standards of culture. Later, I was pained by knowledge of many comforts and pleasures sacrificed to procure my simple toilettes and the other requisites of a social career.

I had all my father's love of art without his talent, although as a child I received instruction in good studios, from papa's friends as well as from himself, and often during my girlhood resorted to pen or brush—illustrating in black and white or painting in *aquarelle*—to add to my scanty pocket-money. In spite or more truly, because, of these experiences, I knew that my talents could never be relied upon to raise the fortunes of the family, and although I longed to be of some assistance to my parents, I could think of no better way than by freeing from obligation the comparatively large sum devoted yearly to my personal needs.

I wished also to ease my mother's mind, as I could only do by my marriage, of a burden of deep anxiety for my future. My views of matrimony had not, by observation, been rendered optimistic, yet I was aware that I must decide myself at some time to take a step made inevitable by the circumstances. And I was glad to exchange the aimless existence I was leading for the responsibilities of a home and children.

I loved New York, my native city, and rejoiced in the assurance that I might establish myself

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there—in a home of my own at last ! During the first year, however, of the new life upon which I entered with such good hope, credulity grew to knowledge and knowledge to despair. Nothing was farther from the thoughts of my companion than the intention of settling in New York or elsewhere, and my life from the beginning was otherwise arranged for me. Three months in every year were to be devoted to foreign travel—and I welcomed such an opportunity of course ; but the remaining nine were to be divided between the cities and the *villes d'eaux* where a “ season ” was in progress. We were to be as fashionable and as much invited as possible, without any inconvenient sense of obligation, and to pass our lives in hotels, furnished villas, and the homes of our friends. Despite the fact that our means were ample, we were to remain care-free from all possessions which might eventually anchor us to a given spot. Above all, there were to be no such encumbrances as *children* to block the way to absolute nomadic freedom.

The last decree was a source of much unhappiness to me. An almost yearning love of children was the result, as I supposed, of the loneliness of my own childhood, and I believed that life with a man who proved on close acquaintance to be of a gloomy and taciturn nature, might still be made bright by their presence. But although I tried many times I never found words to produce a change of

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heart in one who disposed of my objections to the last in entire accordance with his own theories. Except, however, for the attacks of moral revolt to which I was subject and which led to the nursing of dangerous theories upon which I was far from having the courage to act, I never thought of resenting the conditions under which I lived nor to seek freedom from the fetters that were eating into my soul. I had done violence by my marriage to a New England home prejudice against *divorce*, and I shrank with horror from the publicity of such proceedings as conducted in the United States. I would have endured anything, at that time, rather than face a "Yellow Press" scandal!

Three years had, therefore, worn away, season by season, and brought me to the beginning of another round of gaiety in New York.

I should be placing myself in too favourable a light if I allowed it to be supposed that my character had not been undergoing a process of steady deterioration as a result of the influences at work around me. Anarchy had, in truth, been the consequence, and upon the threshold of a fourth year of married life matters moral, mental, and physical had reached a climax of misery with me.

The fatigue of my continual social duties, and the distress of mind into which I had long been plunged, began inevitably to wear upon my previously excellent health and spirits. I

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finally sank, in utter lassitude, to a dull acceptance of my fate and complete indifference as to the possibilities of a future state. But four-and-twenty years of age, yet convinced by experience and observation that life was neither good nor beautiful, I resolved to bear with it but a little longer and then to make an end !

Thereafter I threw myself headlong into the distractions of our gay life, the routine that at last, as a habit had come to fill my whole existence. I never thought during this period of dining at home : it meant a depressing *tête-à-tête* in the restaurant of an hotel in which we had our winter quarters, and was an experience I sought to avoid. It was generally conceded, and I was myself aware, that my companion could be both witty and amusing in the world, yet within the four walls we called our home, his moodiness surpassed belief : days wore sometimes to a week, and during the hours we spent together he could not be induced to utter a syllable even in answer to questions addressed to him.

Failing the invitations that it was my duty to procure, and which, fortunately for our case, were sufficiently numerous, I myself arranged theatre and supper parties, or dinners in the fashionable restaurants. For every evening some entertainment was provided and my days were fully taken up with visits to my dress-makers, numerous " ladies' luncheons ", and

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the inevitable afternoon calls, teas, concerts and *matinées*.

But the season could not be said to have begun : people still lingered in the country houses, rumours only of festivities to come were in the air, and the doors of the opera were still closed. Thus the early months of winter dragged by but slowly, despite my efforts to kill time and thought.

CHAPTER III

ONE day early in December I received a note from a young married woman friend of mine asking me to lunch with her. At her charming house one often had the opportunity of discussing topics of more serious interest than those ordinarily composing our intellectual fare, and one accepted her invitations in agreeable anticipation of finding oneself in an atmosphere which might be termed, for most of us, unusually "rarified."

Upon this occasion amongst the few guests, all, of course, ladies, I found Melita Lawton, with whom I personally had only a slight acquaintance, but of whose recent interest in Spiritism I had heard much during the previous summer in Newport. The facts had been somewhat impressed upon me by surprise at learning of her practical conversion to a cult that counted few, if any, followers in the set called "smart", and because one of the most carefully fostered prejudices of my early education had been against Spiritualism and all its manifestations. My mother owned to a very Puritan sentiment upon this subject, and spared

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no effort to shield me, as a young person of unorthodox inclinations, from the possible temptation of casting in my lot with the votaries of Spiritualism.

During lunch, however, the conversation naturally turned upon the subject ; Miss Lawton related several incidents connected with her experiences, and after coffee in the drawing-room our hostess begged her to "write." Miss Lawton habitually "wrote" with a planchette, which she had not brought with her, but asking for a large sheet of paper, she printed the alphabet out clearly, laid the paper on a table, and placing a small inverted glass upon it, began in this manner to "write." The glass was "controlled" by resting the tips of two fingers lightly on the top, and in a few moments was spinning about over the alphabet, rapidly spelling out words or sentences in answer to the questions asked, mentally for the most part, by the women present.

It was my first experience of a demonstration claiming to be Spiritistic, and I was immediately struck by the rather unusual expressions employed.

As the *séance* proceeded, I became conscious of a singular feeling of embarrassment, and little by little this discomfort grew to a conviction that my own "soul-side" was not in proper condition to bear the observation of beings from a higher plane nor to enter into communication with them ! I felt the idea,

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indeed my impressions altogether, to be rather fantastic, yet I had such confidence in Miss Lawton's sincerity that I could not doubt the experiment to be perfectly authentic in some sense, either telepathic or spiritistic, and although sceptical as to the latter element, still could not shake off the odd feeling of being somehow a discordant element in the affair.

So strong was the sentiment that despite my curiosity as to any reply which might be vouchsafed me, I carefully refrained from putting any question to the sybil myself. In my heart I was impelled to ask : " What must they think who visit us in spirit—admitting, for the moment, that they do exist—of my condition of ~~soul~~ ? " And I was not to escape without my answer. It was spelt out more than once with great insistence, " You are lost to all spirituality ! "

I could scarcely believe that I had transferred to Miss Lawton the thought that, even in my own mind, was rather nebulous and confused, nor that she could so quickly have received and by some subconscious process answered it. It was then not wholly irrational to suspect it of being the frank opinion of some one who was invisibly present !

The other women of the party, not finding in the words a reply to any of their questions, surprised also at the force displayed, and the persistency of the repetition, asked : " What does it mean ? " and Miss Lawton was obliged to

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admit that she could not explain. But I was seized with a violent tremor that shook me inwardly like a leaf in a storm ; amazed and alarmed at the confusion of emotions arisen within me, I bade my hostess a hurried "good-bye," and left the house.

A few days later I travelled away, with my maid, to pay a short visit to Iris. After dinner on the evening of my arrival, I was telling Iris something of my experience at the recent luncheon when it was remembered apropos of the story, that the house contained an old "planchette." After a search this was produced, and Iris and I made an attempt to "write," the result being an indecipherable mass of scribbled matter in which we thought to perceive two or three legible letters. This encouraged us to make a further attempt with the printed alphabet and glass, which we controlled together by each placing the tips of two fingers on the top, and after a few attempts the messages became clear and consecutive.

This experiment also took the form of answers to the mental questions of Iris's mother, and the young man cousin of the house, who dropped in after dinner to find us engaged in this mysterious pastime. The answers we received and transmitted were short, although the expressions were again striking and picturesque ; the *séance* ended abruptly, however, when the cousin, on receiving a reply to some mental query, exclaimed "My God !", and rising, hurriedly

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departed from the house much as I had done a few days previously from my luncheon party !

We spoke much on the following day of our experience ; I was in particular greatly exalted, and longed to find the opportunity of writing again, but our engagements did not permit, and only on returning from a dinner party in the evening did I once more, alone in my own room, make the attempt to write. It was by the same method as before ; I found it slow, but had no difficulty in managing it unaided, and again sat writing until well into the small hours. When I retired at last I was more than ever impelled to accept the demonstrations as truly psychic or ~~mystical~~ in some sense, although by these ~~terms~~ I meant neither supernatural nor inexplicable. I was able to admit certain possibilities as *facts*, capable of scientific elucidation, holding then as always to the belief that nothing in Nature is otherwise than natural, and, therefore, comprehensible to the seeker after truth.

At the conclusion of my visit I returned to New York, and immediately resumed the investigations I had found so absorbing during my absence. I continued to " write " almost uninterruptedly for several days and nights and always, in spite of repeated attempts to use pen or pencil, by the same method as at first, although I had become impatient of it as being both tedious and clumsy.

At last one night came certain illumination ; full conviction blossomed in my heart—yet one

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last question lurked there ! I acknowledged the positive existence of a great Unseen Power, but I longed to receive some assurance as to its *motive*. How was I to procure this so essential information ? I did not know. It was many years since I had bent my knees in prayer, but I could think of no other form in which to put my request so do old customs hold us—I would pray !

“ O God,” I cried in the depths of my soul, “ if I may call you God—High, Wise and Most Perfect Spirit—cause me to know, if such be your will, the *motive* of this great force with which, by means as yet unknown to me, I have come in contact. Is it Good or is it Evil ? ”

I waited, with bowed head and clasped hands. Then a sudden and violent tremor shook me; my right hand was disengaged from the left, raised with a strong movement until my arm was outstretched, and with two fingers upraised I was made to trace in great letters in the darkness, “ I am the Voice of Him you call your God ! ”

Some minor Initiation Mysteries, by which I was bound to the work, followed, and when I emerged from the experience my instruction was begun.

“ Has this doctrine a name ? ” I once asked in the beginning.

“ No. Names are for a day and do not endure. It is, ever was, and ever shall be. It

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is as the elements about us, the air we breathe ; we are one with it in Nature, in Immortality.

“As is the strength of the desire to know, so is the measure of the knowledge. Every earnest seeker after Truth shall find in it that which his heart desires. Have courage and endure. To you also shall be given some measure of your heart’s desire.”

I was now able to write easily with pen or pencil, and entered upon a course of lessons in “Blind Obedience,” which began in the most trivial manner. If I sat at my desk, intending to write, I was very often told to “put on a hat and go out into the air !” When I was seated I was bidden to stand, or *vice versa*. I was also admonished to give up my powders and lotions, the use of a strong scent to which I was addicted, the smoking of cigarettes, as well as numerous other unimportant habits.

As a somewhat “spoilt child,” the necessity of “blind obedience” had never perhaps been very strenuously impressed upon me, but I soon found myself following all directions with an almost automatic precision !

When this had been accomplished we progressed to further instructions, but not until I had made three vows of “silence” or “discretion.” The first was to the effect that I would not talk of my experiences, nor show any of the written matter. The second that I would not attempt to make propaganda, and the third that I would never give public demonstrations

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of any kind. I was made to understand that the infringement of any one of these rules would mean the cessation, temporarily or wholly, of the efforts on my behalf. Not perceiving the slightest possibility of ever wishing to break them I vowed most readily, little realising that later I should be so carried away by my interest as to find keeping the first of them a sufficiently difficult matter.

I was next directed to make various changes in my mode of life, to omit meat and wine from my diet, to select simpler forms of dress, and white rather than colours, whenever practicable. Also to refuse all invitations and to seclude myself as much as possible from the world.

In this way we worked slowly through to the habits of thought and mental attributes, and I was requested to revise my entirely false and superficial standard of worldly values, and no longer to confine my sympathies within the limitations set by nationality, class or colour. My prejudices were numerous and varied, but many were insignificant, and I believed myself in due time to be divested of them all. Of all, that is, but one, "arā" that was ineradicable, a prejudice borne throughout the ages and still in a measure made justifiable by the circumstances that first called it into being.

CHAPTER IV

I HAD progressed to this point in my experiences by Christmas Day. The fête that is so "merry" where children are, was far otherwise in our dull apartment; there were no mutual surprises, no friendly interchange of gifts, nor even conventional expressions of goodwill. We spent the day gloomily, buried in books and newspapers, and ate our Christmas dinner at Delmonico's.

During the holiday week I went into the country for a few days, but returned to resume my work at the beginning of the New Year.

I wrote no longer by day, as before, but was roused or "summoned" from sleep each morning at three o'clock precisely. I rose, slipped on a *peignoir*, lit the sitting-room fire, laid in readiness during the evening, and began my work which I was able to continue for four or five hours without interruption. As soon as the household was astir, the lesson ended; I then bathed, breakfasted, and dressed, and was able by ten o'clock to continue my labours.

During this period I wrote the three stories

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of Egypt, but with by no means a clear understanding of their aim which I thought to be that of interesting me only. Although the stories were short, of perhaps twenty pages of manuscript each, nearly ten days were occupied in their production. At night I wrote easily under control, with such ease indeed that I sometimes wondered at my fluency and the curious impression that I knew exactly what was coming next ; but by day I was set the difficult task of copying the stories, and the precision required by the unseen author was truly amazing. No page might pass which was not letter-perfect and free from corrections of any kind, and I was sometimes obliged, for the slightest defects, to copy one page as many as six or seven times ! The object of this course was to impress the stories well upon my memory, and to aid me in the cultivation of concentration, which I possessed to a very limited degree.

When these Stories of the Past were finished, another hand took up the direction of my studies, and a true " tale of enchantment " was unfolded in revelation of the laws governing the evolution of spirit and matter. By degrees I was led to understand—so far as my capabilities allowed—the scientific nature of the great universal scheme of progression of which all living creatures, noble or humble, are indivisibly a part.

I was completely enthralled, for this was enlightenment, the appeal to reason for which I so

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long had sought! I had no inclination to mysticism as "mystification" only, but was fascinated and delighted to learn that the occult elements were, as I had always supposed, essential parts of all life, of everything in Nature.

The method of instruction during this, the second, period, was made very slow and tedious by my lack of imagination; all information was bestowed in brief declarations of fact, and I was left for hours—a whole day sometimes—to "think the matter out."

Knowing that I must find a solution before I could proceed, I would set to work, and as my interest was great, I seldom failed to arrive at some interpretation. If it were not the right one I was told in a word that I came to dread and greatly to dislike, to "*wait*"; and I knew that I must retrace my steps and start afresh; but if it were correct I was informed simply, "You have found." In time I accepted the expression as a whimsical allusion to my mental methods which, untrained and erratic, sent me in pursuit of my subject much in the spirit of one tracking some wild thing to its lair!

For I was so *naïve* at this time as to suppose that I advanced by my own unaided efforts. This was far from being the case, although I was unaware until long after that I was constantly assisted by *suggestion* during the periods of "waiting," and could never have made such progress otherwise.

On the few occasions when I did really good

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work I was amusingly rewarded by the *scent* of *fresh violets*—my favourite flowers—that filled the air about me and caused me the greatest wonder and delight. In the course of my various seasons I had received many beautiful bouquets, but none that ever gave me so much pleasure as these invisible violets, bestowed in recognition of some small success of my very mediocre intelligence !

At the end of about two weeks' time, I had become so far enlightened that I was able to pass to the demonstration of a fundamental truth without amazement or the straining of my credulity. I was then told that the three stories of Egypt were not, as I supposed, *romances*, designed to exercise my hand and hold my interest, but the "secrets" of one of my own past lives revealed to me, or recalled.

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It may well be imagined that a question often asked of those who were engaged in my instruction was, "Who are you?" Certainly I hoped to write the name of some friend or relation who had already "crossed the great Divide," but the answer, invariably the same, was "The Spirit of Truth."

I soon observed, from differences of handwriting, that the "Spirit of Truth" was not one but several personalities writing in association under that name, and that they were altogether three in number.

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The first wrote in a delicate flowing hand, appearing to be that of a woman, and taught in stories or parables, thus preparing the mind for the acceptance of facts to be stated later. To this clever hand I owed the interesting form of the Egyptian revelations.

It was the fate of another of my unseen friends to answer my innumerable questions. This he did patiently, briefly, never wasting time nor words, in a small, scholarly, carefully-punctuated handwriting, that I was destined to know long and well.

I clearly felt the reserved and disapproving attitude of this instructor to be a constant rebuke to my own rough and exuberant mental manners, yet, apostrophising him as my "patient scribe," I tormented him for years with questions, often trivial or ridiculous, upon every conceivable subject.

The third of my instructors to manifest himself, knit together the work of the other two and presented the subject as an actual science. Under the control of this unseen friend, who, unlike the others, who gave no personal sign, prefaced his communications with the letter "S," I wrote more easily and with more strength and concentration than with either of the others. For this influence was most subtle and penetrating; the touch, although light and flexible, was extremely positive, and I soon judged "S" to be more sympathetic by nature and far more dominating in character than either the "Scribe"

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or that interesting feminine personality who continued to the end of our pleasant, if obscure, relation as the "Spirit of Truth."

The lessons of "S" began with the freehand writing of one or more rows of large symmetrical "S's," but this I knew was an exercise, as of a master who runs his fingers over the keys of an instrument to test its vibrant and responsive quality. The handwriting was bold and clear and sloping to a peculiar angle, and it was in the course of these lessons that I began to be troubled by hearing each word *spoken* before I wrote it down!

This perplexed and disturbed me greatly, and led me finally to consider the possibility of having developed some form of brain malady or hallucination. In spite of repeated and perfectly audible assurances to the contrary, I began to fear that I was breaking down mentally under the unusual strain, and I resolved to give up my work altogether for a time.

The oral demonstrations continued, however, until I could hear whole sentences spoken by someone who referred, in a perfectly natural way, to everyday events and surroundings!

Then the voices became more numerous and audible, and the languages more varied. I heard not only English but French: one voice reassured me continually in that language—and I have heard it from that time to this, whenever I have required advice upon any question of health! Several voices conversed

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fluently and rapidly in a tongue unknown to me, possibly Sanskrit, and I could also distinguish words and sentences in Italian, which I partly understood.

With this babel of languages mingling with my own apprehensions within my unfortunate head, I was soon too confused and demoralised to judge if I were sane and actually *heard*—or if I simply raved !

Distracted, I tried to *lose* “ the Voices ” by returning to the world. I rushed to parties, theatres, the opera—and everywhere the Voices accompanied me. I heard them always, close beside me, remarking in the ball-room on the toilettes, or the decorations, in the theatre on the merits or demerits of the play.

Presently I feared to show myself ; people began to observe my changed appearance—my strained and haunted expression. I shut myself up alone in the apartment, and grappled with what I thought to be a desperate situation.

Meanwhile I suffered so intensely in my fear of insanity and the looming madhouse that I wonder my senses did not indeed forsake me. The obstinate quality of my Yankee brain was equal to the strain, however, and I emerged at last from the most trying of all my experiences able to distinguish a difference between the words produced by my own processes of thought and the *sounds* of words produced by the vibrations set up by certain efforts without.

At this point the letter “ S ” became to me

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the sign of one able by his ability and preferring to teach by sound rather than in writing, and I came also to understand why the cultivation of this second sense of hearing had been so resolutely pursued.

A time had come when my private papers were no longer sacred and had of necessity to be destroyed, lest the odd matter of which they were for the most part composed should be seized as evidence of my *madness*—undoubted at that time by one person—and an excuse for my relegation to the privacy of an asylum as a not unwelcome solution of the domestic difficulty. The three “Secrets” were then burned with all other manuscript, and what I wrote from that time onward was immediately destroyed.

I never mastered the system of *learning* by sound, as I could not concentrate my attention for a sufficient length of time. I continued, therefore, to write, and it remained the means upon which I always relied, although I was thankful, at the end of this disagreeable experience, to understand the method by which later, in many places, and at many times, I received warnings or instructions of inestimable value to me.

At the end of the course in clairaudience I felt worn and nervous, and the strain of work was slightly relaxed. I was still roused to continue writing in the early hours of the morning, but was not so fully occupied by day. I entered then upon the third and last period of learning,

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and was surprised by the visits of a new instructor.

His handwriting was faint and irregular, as of a very weak or aged person; the lessons, broken by periods of repose, were, I believe, as exhausting to teacher as to pupil. It was the mission of this good friend to tell me of the *Future*, and it was he who announced to me the wholly unexpected and startling fact that I was destined to be brought once more together with Splendira!

He told me of his foreign nationality in the words, "We are of one race," gave me his unusual Christian name, and mentioned other circumstances which might serve as a positive means of identification. As, for instance, that Splendira had been in America travelling in Mexico and the West, the name of the hotel in New York at which he had stopped, as well as the number and the actual relationship of the members of the party. I was also told that he would soon be "summoned" to return.

I obtained this information bit by bit and by laborious effort, despite the fact that the subject was of deepest interest to me, and when the lessons, which were always brief, were brought to a close, I proceeded invariably to invoke my "Patient Scribe" by an ascending column of questions.

"Do tell me," I begged on one occasion, "when and where Splendira and I are to meet?"

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"You will meet," was the calm reply.

"You will not say!"—disappointedly. "But tell me at least how I shall know him!"

"You will recognise him," came the answer, "by his *hair*."

"That is surely impossible," I told myself. "In the visions his hair was of a most unusual colour, but now it must be quite different, and I cannot believe that Splendira, when he comes, will wear it falling over his ears, and cut in that odd archaic fashion!"

The latter part of this observation assumed the nature of a question, and I awaited a reply. None was vouchsafed, so I hazarded another.

"How will he recognise *me*? Not, by my *hair*, which was formerly as black as night and is now just as excessively fair!"

"He will recognise you," replied the long-suffering scribe, "by your nose."

At this I laughed outright. "My nose," I admitted, "is not my worst feature, but now I understand that you are trying to tease!"

"No."

"But yes!"—and I would not be assured, for although I by no means always shared in it I was frequently aware of the amusement I caused my unseen friends by persisting in an exaltation which was altogether foreign to my nature, and the sly pleasure they took in bringing me down to a more commonplace level by the simple expedient of making some such statements as those above.

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I hardly know how to account for the absurd impression with which I embarked upon the work, that all intercourse with those upon the higher planes must necessarily be conducted with preternatural solemnity, and entirely unrelieved by any saving gleam of humour. Perhaps this conviction was a puritan inheritance engrained in the very physical fibres of my brain, but, whatever its source, the first efforts made to dispel this dark belief certainly filled me with most comical suspicion !

Light or colloquial language positively shocked me, while the apparition under my hand, on occasions when I had been particularly dull, of a rapidly-sketched moon-face, with button-eyes and drooping mouth, crowned by an enormous fool's cap seemed to me quite alarming ! The allusion was obvious, of course, but I continued, most idiotically, to think : " This is dreadful ! It must surely be wrong to deal with these matters in a frivolous spirit."

I made my way, however, out of this gloomy habit, helped to some extent by native humour, and soon progressed to more natural terms of intimacy with my instructors, although this attitude was not perfectly consistent, and I relapsed at times into a certain heavy emotionalism.

Undoubtedly I felt that my questions concerning the wonderful promised meeting with Splendira ought only to be answered in lofty or poetic phrase, and if I had been warned that

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at the fateful moment I should fall writhing into catalepsy, I should have accepted the statement—unpleasant as it might be—with credulity. As it was, I believed that I had been amiably rebuked, as often before, for my inclination to be over-sentimental, and I did not seek to pursue the topic.

CHAPTER V .

HAVING excited my intense interest by telling of Splendira and the prospect of our meeting, my new instructor dropped the subject, as I thought, and took up quite another.

One morning he astounded me by stating, "You will become a Roman Catholic." This to me was a "bolt from the blue," and I could not believe that my eyes had rightly read the sentence. Having pondered long upon it and concluded that it must be a mistake, I was made to toil painfully through the writing of the same words several times again. It was no mistake—I was startled!

"Who *can* this be?" I wondered, not, of course, expecting a reply, yet my hand went on to trace in trembling characters across the page, "A Friend of Pio Nono."

I stared at the words in amazement. What *did* they mean? Surely I had not been instructed to hold myself aloof from all sectarian forms and prejudices that I might now become a bigot. No; there must be some hidden meaning, or possibly, the intention was to test

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the measure of my new-found loyalty, so, taking up my pen, I wrote firmly : " Never ! "

" Yes, yes," quavered the vague handwriting immediately following up the exclamation. " You will—you must—become a Catholic. Your marriage holds only in the law ; it does not bind in Holy Church."

As few persons were at the time aware, and I myself had not the least suspicion, that the man whose name I bore was, unlike the other living members of his immediate family, a Roman Catholic, it is not strange that I should fail to see that the statements followed in any possible sequence those made me just previously concerning Splendira.

On the occasion of my marriage I had expressed a wish, unhesitatingly complied with, that the minister of a Presbyterian church, which I had attended as a child with my mother, should be asked to officiate, and later the question of religion had never happened to arise. I will not say the fact that Ferreira was of the Roman faith was voluntarily obscured, but probably it was not thought necessary to bring it prominently forward, it being well known that members of the Church of Rome, once divorced, are not permitted to remarry, and any religious ceremony performed over them with that intention regarded by the Church as wholly invalid.

I failed utterly, therefore, to understand the trend of observations on the subject of a change

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of faith, and by my ignorance and want of insight very nearly caused later the sacrifice of two lives.

The general tendency of my training had been to force me to find my own conclusions and being unable to put another construction upon the words, "You will become a Catholic," I held to my impression that they were intended as *a test*, and, in spite of the assurance that I was mistaken, clung to this opinion with the greatest obstinacy.

Finding me determined to persist in my wrong-headedness, "The Friend of Pio Nono" turned to another topic, and I accepted the circumstance as intimation that my wild guess as to his meaning had been correct.

It was now this kind friend's pleasure to bestow upon us, in his own infinitely patient way, our "soul names," or pseudonyms. "Splendira" was that by which the one whose fate I had so far followed under an Egyptian name, was to be henceforth known to me, while the pseudonym conferred, in all charity, upon myself was that of "Astra ; of the Highest House." It was drawn from the motto, "Per Casta ad Astra," which I was to take for my own, but the meaning of the odd predicate, "Of the Highest House," was not explained to me.

I was embarrassed by the suggestiveness of my new title, the injunction laid upon me by the new motto, and the thought that I must now attempt to scale a height which might

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prove far beyond the limit of my attainments. But the more I thought upon the subject of my pseudonym the more perplexed I became ; it was, by its nature, so clearly undeserved a gift, that I began presently to ask myself whether I was really meant to accept and bear it—or if by any possibility I could have sub-consciously composed the name and bestowed it upon myself ! The serpent Doubt, which I thought to have long since annihilated, again raised his ugly head !

It was largely, perhaps, because of my lack of intelligent co-operation that the messages of my last instructor seemed so dim and rambling, were faintly and slowly written and yet with such exhausting effort. From the first the communications of “ The Friend of Pio Nono ” threw my mind into a state of confusion and caused a renewal of the doubt that frequently tormented me during the early days of my experience. At that time I longed for *proof* ; not by the tipping of tables, or such means, of which I had heard and had a wholesome horror, but proofs upon higher lines which would convince me beyond question that my own ideas, or knowledge, played no part in the composition of the written matter. I had been definitely told, however, that I need not look for *proof*, and later, I ceased even to wish for it, being convinced by the nature of the communications that I had not aided mentally in their production.

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Now, however, troubled by the elusive quality of the messages, doubt again assailed me, and the longing for proof returned as strong as ever.

“*Per Casta ad Astra*,” I read and re-read the words—“if one could only know—only be *sure* !” I said.

For that evening—contrary to my custom at the time—I had accepted the invitation of Joan, an old school friend of mine, to the party that she promised would be both small and early. There was to be a supper after the theatre, with dancing to follow, in the course of which I knew that I could slip away, and Joan amiably made a point of my being present at the supper.

The guests on this occasion grouped and seated themselves according to their own fancy, we who were intimates gravitating as usual toward one table, and when our party of six was complete it included, as it happened, three persons who were to some extent aware of my interests at the time : Iris—who shared in my first experience—also Linda and Jerry ; and it had come about in this way :

During the second period of my instruction I had been so carried away by the intensely interesting nature of the knowledge being disclosed to me that I begged permission to speak upon the subject with a few of my intimate friends. It seemed scarcely fair to lock such knowledge in my own breast, and I longed to

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share it with my friends whose interest, I did not doubt, would equal my own.

"And which of your friends would you take with you?" was the odd question asked by the mysterious instructor whose sign was the letter "S." "Write their names!" After a little thought I did so, six in all, four women and two men. The name of one woman was erased, but the others were allowed to pass. How I rejoiced!

"And what may I tell them?" I asked.

"You may ask them to *write*," was the reply.

My spirits fell! I did not appreciate the perfect wisdom of this answer at the moment, but I understood that the edict was not to be gainsaid.

The list of names, as amended, read: Iris, Linda, Titine, Jerry and Jack. I had, it is true, few opportunities of seeing them, but when occasion offered tried always to lead to a discussion of things occult, and to encourage them to "write."

Some time had passed since I had spoken with Jerry, but finding him beside me at supper I managed, at a moment when the conversation around us was most animated, to ask if he had tried to "write."

"Yes," he answered shortly.

"And——?" I queried.

"And it's all nonsense," he continued in the same manner, but not meeting my glance. "However, I have a message for you—let us

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rather say 'a toast'—from 'A Friend of Pio Nono,' " and raising his glass to mine, "*Per Casta ad Astra!*" he said.

There was a moment's lull in the conversation, and this unusual "toast" caught the ears of the other members of the party, who at once agreed to adopt it as the "device" of our little band, and I was grateful that the talk and laughter that followed covered my own amazement upon receiving in this unexpected manner just such a *proof* as I had long desired. Still held by vow not to talk of my experiences, I could say nothing of my surprise to Jerry, nor was I ever able to learn from him by what means he had been induced to become the bearer of a message from "A Friend of Pio Nono!"

I accepted my pseudonym in a spirit of extreme humility, for it was laid as "coals of fire" upon my head by the unseen friend who suffered much from my lack of brilliant qualities. I have not made use of it in this document because I am still of the opinion that he whose mission it was to speak only of the Future did not intend me to accept the name as a present possession, but as the guerdon of possibly *future* achievement, the reward that I might hope to attain to after many years.

With the episode of the message I reached the end of six weeks of endeavour, and was led to remark that, dating from the New Year, forty days and forty nights had been devoted to acquiring knowledge of the Past, the Present and

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the Future. I was no longer roused in the early morning, and was bidden to resume to some extent my usual daily routine ; but then came the reaction, and indeed, since the experience in aural training, I had been feeling every day more tired, weak and nervous. " Why is it ? " I asked the " Patient Scribe," who was always near.

" We are trying," he wrote in his quaint and often satiric manner, " to make you ill." " What may that mean?—" I wondered solemnly, when I ought to have laughed. " Is it a reproach to my conviction that the experience has cost me dear in physical strength and vitality, or am I really going to be ill ? I certainly feel so. Perhaps I am going to *die* ! "

The more I dwelt upon this idea, the more plausible it seemed to me. Besides, my death was so obvious a solution of the domestic difficulty, one so frequently considered and devoutly to be wished, that I accepted the conclusion calmly and with but few regrets.

The promised meeting with Splendira would take place, I felt sure, upon some higher plane. The expression, " We are of one race "—clue, as I believed, to the Italian nationality of Splendira—might be taken to mean that he and the " Friend of Pio Nono " were of one psychic class or caste. Splendira was numbered with the Hosts of Heaven and waited for me in another star ! The summons to return would reach him from my deathbed !

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When, therefore, I caught a chill a short time after, and was struck down by a serious illness, I felt, almost with pleasure, that I stood upon the threshold of more complete and perfect knowledge—of a period of repose, perhaps of *happiness*, at last !

Some time before my illness, in accordance with the advice given me, I had made several attempts to arrive at an understanding with the partner of my sorrows as to an actual, if not necessarily apparent, divergence of our ways. Objections to our life, often previously voiced, again found utterance only to be put aside as frivolous—the last word, certainly, that should have been applied to them !

My suggestions having been ignored, I had been directed to take a further step and state my intention of seeking legal freedom if the plan of a superficial separation were not agreed to. This announcement became, from that time, a source of continual contention and, from the moment that I lay helpless and unable to escape, the subject of violent and enervating discussions which were continued until my kind doctor almost despaired of ever getting me upon my feet again.

Although I dreaded the agitation into which I was thrown by the daily visits to my bedside of the man whose attentions to me during my illness began and ended thus, I held firm to my resolve never to admit so much as the possibility of taking up the old life, nor should I have

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dared to do so in opposition to my instructions. Privately, however, I felt convinced that I claved mainly to a principle, and was not destined to rise and face the former situation again.

Yet at other times during my illness, I had hours of great happiness. Iris came to be near me, and hovering nearby always, were the unseen friends. As I could write easily in my weakened state they tried in many ways to interest and divert me, and chiefly through the hand of her whose duty it was to instruct or to amuse by the writing of verses, stories and parables.

All the work was of a bright and cheerful nature, and even included a gay little comedy entitled *Whistling Girls*, in which the characters bore the names and amiably exaggerated peculiarities of myself and my particular women friends !

But although engaged in writing fiction for my pleasure, the " Spirit of Truth " never wholly departed from the paths of truth, and for this reason the " parables " were of deepest interest to me. The verses delighted me because they were so charming, and I had never been able to find the simplest rhyme myself, but the parables, because they were of a mystic nature, and contained many references to a state upon which I pondered much, being, as I believed, so near to its attainment.

I was happy to be allowed to keep several of these writings, no longer disconnected matter

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that looked so "mad" to unaccustomed eyes, but page upon page of tidy manuscript, and I observed, with a certain spiteful pleasure, that my papers, being abstracted as usual, were returned with a look of surprise at my sudden development of a quite unsuspected talent!

Thus two months passed; I was from the first too weak physically, and far too resigned mentally, to aid by the smallest effort in my own recovery, yet slowly—somewhat to my astonishment—I came back to life again and rose at last, pale and thin, in the early days of spring.

Oh, the strange pleasure of that spring-time recovery; the coming back to life, a changed woman, at the season of Nature's glorious rebirth, the burgeoning into being of all green and fragrant things! I experienced then the almost childish joy in every kindness, every little attention shown, and every flower given, that is the common happiness of all convalescents; and my friends were indeed good to me at that time; my sitting-room blossomed always with the loveliest masses of fresh spring flowers.

A great change in my appearance now worked for my good; the terms of a new order of existence were tacitly accepted at last, and I was left to seek the quiet of the cottage at Tuxedo entirely alone.

CHAPTER VI

I WAS greatly attached to the cottage, perched above the roadside and facing lovely Tuxedo Lake. A final response to my demand for a *pied-à-terre*, somewhere on earth, it was small, and the exterior most unbeautiful, but I had devoted much affectionate care to the arrangement of the interior. There I enjoyed perfect peace, and the solitude that was merely visual as I knew myself to be, in the truest sense, never alone.

I had been settled for a month in the cottage, when I was directed by my unseen friends to make my way to a village on the Hudson where the parents of two dear friends of my school-girl days were living. Following the daughters' sad and most untimely deaths I had, to my shame, allowed myself to lose touch with their kind parents and other members of the immediate family circle that included the charming girl whom I, in common with the rest, called "Cousin Prudence."

On arrival at the picturesque riverside home, I found Prudence, now grown to early womanhood, waiting with my hostess to greet me.

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She had come from the cottage nearby, where she lived, to devote her life, to the exclusion of all youthful pleasures, to the care of the motherless children, five in number, of the older of my two dead friends.

Although my visit to "Riverside" was short, I had time to see that Prudence was burdened with responsibilities beyond her years and that her charming face although as pretty as ever often looked tired and worn. Before I left, therefore, I had her promise to visit me at Tuxedo and having persuaded an aunt of the children to take them in charge, Prudence came for a fortnight to share my quiet life.

I soon asked permission to speak to her of my experiences, not only because they were of such intense interest to me, but because I hoped she might by such means, be greatly aided in the difficult position that she so nobly tried to fill. I was told as usual in the usual phrase, "You may ask her to write", and this, as usual, I hastened to do.

Prudence soon proved extraordinarily amenable to "control" and was able to write, as I never could, in ignorance of the subject of the communications. They were in general brief, but all of a prophetic nature, and I put a number aside in the interest of knowing what, in their connection, time might bring forth. Although Prudence was sincerely interested in the demonstrations she did not arrive at a fixed opinion concerning the source of them during the

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fortnight that she spent with me, and returned to her home with a new interest and a mind open to conviction, but nothing more.

After my charming visitor was gone, I remained alone to enjoy the pleasant monotony of quiet days until mid-July, when I bade a regretful farewell to the cottage and my contemplative existence and set out on the journey to Newport.

If I had consulted my own inclinations I should have remained quietly at home during the summer, for I had not entirely recovered from the effects of my illness ; but I had received other, and most imperative, instructions from those who were directing my destiny at this time.

Passing through New York, I stopped at the Waldorf and was rejoined by Ferreira whom I had arranged to meet with the object of finally settling the terms of our agreement to live apart. An informal document was drawn up and signed on this occasion, and when the affair was concluded I remained to attend to several unimportant matters while Ferreira proceeded on his way to Newport.

Although I had been the one to dictate terms, I had done so in accordance with the advice given me and without reference to my personal wishes, which would certainly have led to a definite rupture or divorce. My ideas had undergone great changes during the previous months and I was less appalled now by

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certain anticipation of a "Yellow Press" scandal than by recollection of having weakly submitted to the disagreeable conditions of my life merely to avoid it.

Our understanding was to live henceforth apart, unless it became necessary or expedient for us to meet, on a conventional footing before the eyes of the world, to "save the speech of people." With this measure of freedom I was obliged to be satisfied, and happy enough after all in the terms of the agreement, I proceeded in my turn to Newport where Ferreira and I were to come together, as fellow guests in the house of a friend, that the suspicions of his sister who was expected from England on a visit might not be aroused as to the situation between us.

I made the journey to Newport with a lighter heart than I had borne for many a day, but when I stepped out of my host's brougham at the doors of the most picturesque and beautifully appointed house in Newport, I felt unaccountably nervous and agitated. As I had been leading for many months a most retired life, and passing through experiences which had changed me greatly in sentiment and character, I could not fail to be affected by standing once again upon the ground of the old associations of my girlhood and the following years, yet my agitation altogether passed the bounds set by these circumstances.

I had scarcely entered the house, and

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greeted the friends gathered there in the hall, when I felt irresistibly impelled to turn back to the carved oak table, standing opposite the entrance door, upon which the cards of visitors were at first displayed, and later thrown into a bowl of old blue and white china. Disregarding the cards of the afternoon, still lying on the table, I tossed those in the bowl hurriedly over until I had selected, from amongst many bearing foreign names and titles, one found at some distance from the top and read the name "Béla de Varshonyi" engraved upon it.

As I stood with this card in my hand staring in surprised recognition at the unusual Christian name, I was still further amazed by the sudden recurrence of my old Egyptian vision. At the same moment I either thought—or heard—the words: "It is he!"

The vision soon faded, and my astonishment abated almost as quickly to the conviction that my senses had been thrown into disorder by the heat and fatigue of the journey, the first since my illness. Throwing the card back, therefore, into the bowl, I turned to rejoin my friends and thought no more of the matter.

During the days that followed I heard often of the three young noblemen of a race little known to our ignorance—save by the wild music of gipsy musicians—who had arrived a short time before us in Newport, and of whose visit to her hospitable shores, Newport society, it was evident, expected much in a variety of

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interesting ways. The strangers, it appeared, were possessed of qualities to which all of our visiting "foreigners," particularly of that season could not lay claim ; in a negative sense as being no fortune hunters, and more positively in their cleverness, distinction, and good looks. I soon became curious to see "the three Hungarians," although several days passed before I had the opportunity of doing so.

The season lagged somewhat that year ; no private parties were being given, but a few nights after my arrival one of the weekly casino dances was held. These were dismal functions enough as a rule, and as such I carefully avoided them, but on the evening in question several of us, for want of better diversion, decided after dinner to "go on."

I was glad to find at the dance a number of friends who had arrived in much the same spirit of desperation as ourselves, but the big ball-room wore a deserted air and there was, as usual, a lamentable want of *entrain*.

I was wandering through a set of lancers, reflecting upon nothing more serious than that the unbecoming rose-pink gown I was wearing had turned out to be quite good enough for the occasion, when I chanced to look toward the end of the ball-room, where, in semi-obscurity under the gallery, many empty chairs stood ranged in solemn rows. A previous glance at least had shown that all were vacant, but this time I stared, started, and nearly fell, in the

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shock of recognising in the young man, now seated there alone, the face and form of one seen many times in my visions of Egypt. It was beyond all possibility of doubt—it was *Splendira* !

For a moment I believed that I dreamed, that my senses had played me false—or forsaken me altogether, so striking and perfect a likeness was it of the young man pictured in my visions, so calm—so luminous—seemed the handsome face against the obscure background of that ill-lighted space beneath the gallery !

My eyes I think, must almost have started from their sockets ; I looked and looked again—could I be mad ? Was it an “ apparition ” ? Was it living flesh and blood ? I was trembling in every limb, and could scarcely find my voice but I clutched at the arm of an exasperated partner who was vainly endeavouring to guide my footsteps through the final mazes of the lancers, and asked confusedly, “ Do tell me if—I mean can you tell me *who*—that man is sitting under the gallery ! ”

“ Why, certainly,” he said with a glance of surprise at the manner of my question. “ That’s the Count Béla Varshonyi ”—mispronouncing the name I had read on the visiting card, so oddly sought out on the day of my arrival !

It was true, then—it was he ! How well I knew the face, the beauty and distinction of every feature, the strange luminous quality, due in life, as I saw, to the clear skin and

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extremely brilliant eyes ! And then the hair ! The wonderful hair, of a soft unusual colour as of darkest sable, and of a gleaming texture only to be seen upon the head of a child ! Well had the " Patient Scribe " said, " You will recognise him by his *hair*," for if by no other feature, and despite its being worn in a simple although somewhat personal, modern fashion, I still should thus have known him.

No, there was, there could be, no mistake ! Not only did I recognise him, but in a transport of joy my heart went out to him. I loved him ! I knew that I had always loved him, that I had waited, watched, mourned for him through all the years of many weary lives !

Meanwhile, it became clear to my not entire inexperience in such matters that the count was observing me fixedly, and during the remainder of the dance I felt his bright magnetic eyes upon me. The clear grey-green of his brilliant eyes, was the surprise of the face to me, for never, in my visions of boy or man, had I seen them otherwise than cast down !

By an effort I had regained some appearance of composure but beneath the surface confusion reigned. My thoughts were in hysterical disorder—I wanted to laugh, to cry out exultantly, and yet to burst into tears ! I hated my pink gown and asked myself furiously why I had not worn *white*. He might have recognised me—or *did he* ? Could it be that he " knew " me, as I " knew " him !

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The music of the lancers melted into the measures of a *valse* ; someone asked me to dance. I had reason to believe that dancing was my one accomplishment in the old days in Egypt and it was still the one thing that I could do really well. I would dance, therefore, and because I felt that I must by some means avoid the introduction that I knew to be inevitable, until my nerves were under complete control.

As the *valse* came to an end, and I returned to my seat, I observed with disappointment, mingled however, with relief, that the count was gone, and I immediately afterward left the ball-room, called for the brougham and was driven rapidly home.

However easy it might have been for me to accept the strange story of our common past, the predictions of a future meeting with Splendira as I sat alone, and half-entranced, over my work at night, it now seemed, as I emerged from the casino ball-room and left its tawdry lights and the meaningless tinkle of its music behind, almost impossible to believe that the hour had struck, the long predestined moment arrived in this unexpected, unromantic manner !

“ Tell me where Splendira and I are to meet ? ” I had begged of the “ Patient Scribe ”, and by his cryptic words “ You will meet,” he had thoughtfully avoided distressing me by the answer, “ In the Newport casino ! ”

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I entered the house on my return from the dance and reached my room unobserved, and in a most unsettled state of mind, proceeded about my toilette for the night. When, after long it was completed—observing the hour to be nearly three—I extinguished all the lights save a solitary candle, seated myself at the writing-table and tried to “write.”

Hanging, with pencil poised, over my paper, I endeavoured to control my agitation and to induce a calm, receptive mood. Actually, I was filled with a burning curiosity and a thousand questions fluttered in my mind, but I would not formulate them ; I asked and awaited nothing but a few words to set my mind at rest and bring me back to calm and confidence. Still the pencil hung motionless, clasped in my rigid fingers ! In despair I was about to give up the attempt when my hand began to move slowly and I scrawled across the page in an unformed, irregular handwriting, shaken apparently by emotion—or mirth—these words : “You will become a countess.”

At this my exaltation fell ; I jumped up in exasperation, and threw my pencil on the floor, exclaiming in thought as I did so : “This is too much ! Here I sit, as I imagine like a Sybil of old, awaiting some sign or mystic utterance, only to produce from the depths of my own silly brain and excited fancy a communication worthy of a gipsy fortune-teller ! The atmosphere of Newport is not suited to

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this work. While I am here I *will not* try to write ! ”

Having silently, but not therefore less exuberantly, delivered myself of these remarks, I distinctly heard, issuing from the shadows behind me, a faint laugh which unmistakably had a mocking ring ! “ You may well laugh,” I thought irritably, as I turned to face the sound, “ although I ought really to have completed the prophecy by adding : ‘ You will soon meet a pretty gentleman ’ !

“ Yet, from whatever point one views the affair,” I continued to myself, “ it is frightfully perplexing ; I am too tired and stupid, evidently, to think it out to-night—and I shall go to bed ! ”

I retired thereupon, to the great four-posted Elizabethan bedstead and hoped to find oblivion—but it was not to be. My restless thoughts would not be still, and harking backward across the months I picked up and pieced together, bit by bit, the fabric of the tale. I recalled the stories of the life in Egypt of Ahalya and Splendira, and added the items concerning a future, now, in one bewildering moment, become the *present*. But here I paused to remind myself that I had never asked what might *follow* a meeting with Splendira, and to realise that I had been far too amazed by the mere statement to have a thought beyond it, or to consider that there might still be the story of a common future to unfold. If

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that were the case I might, quite logically—but, no !—It was ridiculous, preposterous, I was mad to think of it, and I must sleep or I should be quite pale and haggard in the morning. Finally, exhausted, I fell into a troubled slumber only to be awakened shortly afterwards by the arrival at my door of the maid with my early tea.

A glance in the mirror on rising more than confirmed my premonitions of the night : I was looking decidedly wan and tired, and announced my intention of spending the day in my room and going down only in the evening for dinner. I wrote and despatched a few notes to some of my women friends begging them, if they passed my way, to drop in for an hour's chat, and then settled myself in the window-seat with a book, and the determination to avoid, for one whole day at least, all thought of the tangled web of circumstances in which I was involved.

My day of durance passed quickly, and the complete rest cleared my brain. I was again able to think coherently at least, and I determined to proceed with extreme caution thereafter, avoiding for a time, rather than seeking, the meeting with Splendira.

I was greatly agitated by the wish to know whether Splendira, as the "modern man", had been as fully enlightened as myself concerning our common past, although I deemed it most unlikely that the measure of his knowledge

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would prove equal to my own. My observations did not favour the belief that the young men of the day were in general addicted to fasting and penance, or to grappling with abstruse problems of a psychic and scientific nature, and in so far as this conviction concerned Splendira, I really did not know whether to be sorry—or to heave a sigh of relief !

We were, I knew, so wholly “ in the hands of Fate ” that nothing would now avail to change the predestined order of events. The situation seemed hopelessly obscure and tangled, and I could not see through the gloom and bewilderment of it that there was even promise of a light beyond. What we had rightly willed and worked for would inevitably bring about just results, but what we had built awry in long past lives we could no more pull down than we could beat upon the Pyramids, and tear them down with our bare hands !

CHAPTER VII

DURING the next few days I remained much at home and avoided the casino. Then, one evening, our host gave a dinner-party, after which we were all invited to go on to the dance arranged at a popular private house to introduce the "the three Hungarians," who had brought letters to the hostess.

Before dinner I decided not to go to the dance; nevertheless, I made a most careful toilette and was not displeased when Marceline, my maid, proposed a white-and-silver gown that I particularly fancied.

Of course in the end I "went on" with the rest, salving my conscience with the promise that I would only have a look in and return almost immediately.

We got off rather late and on arriving, found the house crowded to the utmost capacity, the ball-room a seething crush of dancers, into the midst of which I soon allowed myself to be whirled by a youthful partner. I loved dancing under agreeable conditions, but the heat and crowd were too great for enjoyment,

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so having made one *tour*, I withdrew to one side and stood fanning myself and talking with my partner.

Presently I noticed Tommy Stuyvesant making his way between the dancing couples to ask me, on gaining our haven of refuge, "May I introduce Count Varshonyi?"

"Delighted," I murmured in a conventional tone, but in secret trepidation, observing the count—who moved with a peculiar swift grace and distinction—coming a longer and less perilous way round to join us.

"You have heard, I suppose," Tommy went on, "that he does not speak English."

"You cannot mean," I returned in surprise, "that he only speaks German and *Hungarian*!"

Here was an *impasse*! I had not heard that the count spoke little or no English.

"How awkward! I don't speak a word!" I exclaimed in dismay, as Tommy turned to join the extremely handsome young man who now approached us.

"French—he speaks French!" whispered my partner, and, "Madame," said Tommy Stuyvesant at the same moment in that language, "permit me to present to you the Comte de Varshonyi."

The count met my glance with the direct gaze of his clear eyes, a frank and sympathetic smile that showed his beautifully white, strong teeth. Then he brought his heels together

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quickly in the military manner, and made a slight bow.

What I said I cannot recall, but it was, something perfectly *banal*; probably "Do you like Newport?" or "Have you been here long?" "My nervousness had vanished utterly however, and I felt extraordinarily gay and exhilarated. The count and I talked together for some minutes—and how I thanked the blessed shade of my mother for my possession of fluent French! But he did not ask me to dance, and my partner, who still lingered near, eventually bore me off again into the whirl.

As the actual season in Newport consists of the month of August, into which all possible forms of entertainment, by day and night are crowded, it was inevitable that during the following weeks the count and I should meet daily, almost hourly, in our pursuit of pleasure. From the first he certainly paid me no more marked attentions than did several others, and it was easy to see that many of our "ways" were strange to eyes accustomed to the more correct manners of quite a different world.

We were passing at that time, in Newport and elsewhere, through the phase of emulating everything English. Many of us having painstakingly acquired deep and throaty voices,—distressingly unlike the real thing!—spoke a diverting mixture of Oxford and Cockney English that invariably convulsed our British

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friends, although in aping the extremely casual, not to say loose, manners affected by the super-individuals whom we admired as "the prince's set" we had achieved more complete success

I should not perhaps appear to say that we all pretended merely to be fast and cynical or smart, but certainly many of us did so and we could only thank our own snobbishness if the foreign visitors of that season failed to discriminate and placed us all, more or less, in the same category.

As I had been long enough out of the world to lose my hold somewhat upon the devoted swains of former seasons, such attentions as I did receive were only general and I had neither the wish nor intention to work a change in this condition of affairs for two very excellent reasons. The first was my lack of interest, and the second that my 'every act was spied upon, every letter of my harmless correspondence opened, in the hope of finding a weapon no matter how inadequate, with which to parry my now suspected intention of claiming a divorce.

I saw the count then, with my other men friends and acquaintances, in the world only. He and I were never alone together, yet, in our happy sense of isolation from the crowd around us, were I think, always and perfectly alone. As he did not dance—although with his slim figure and graceful ways he would have made a

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wonderful dancer—we talked quietly apart of many things ; of our travels, and our various interests. And in course of time the count came to speak of his former visit to the United States, of his travels in Mexico and the West with a party of friends and cousins with whom he afterward stopped in New York at the old Fifth Avenue Hotel. He related to me, indeed, on this occasion, all the circumstances exactly as set down many months previously by the “ Friend of Pio Nono ! ”

“ And,” said the count, “ when I left America at the end of my visit I had no idea of returning. It is a long journey from my home, I detest the sea voyage, but the odd thing was ”—he laughed slightly—“ that I was obliged in spite of myself to come back.”

“ Why was that ? ” I asked, hanging secretly upon his answer.

“ I really cannot say ; ” he continued. “ I was out in the stables one morning, looking at a new horse, when the feeling suddenly came over me that I must return to New York. It was not *apropos*, as you see, and I had had no previous wish to go, yet the impulse, summons—call it what you will—was so imperative that in less than a week’s time I was already on the way.”

“ Rather extraordinary, wasn’t it ? ” I murmured.

“ I thought it strange,” he said. “ It made quite an impression upon me at the time ; but

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you are interested in such things, I hear. Can you explain them? Do you think they mean anything at all?"

I was naturally much puzzled by his words, by the effort to decide whether he had been directly instructed to speak of these things, to ask these questions, by the "Friend of Pio Nono" who had once proved his ability to send me an even more unusual form of message through quite another medium, or if the count were an unconscious agent. To gain time, therefore, I replied feebly: "Probably without quite realising it, you really wanted to come back all the time!"

"No," he said earnestly, "I neither intended nor wished to return, but now I begin to see that the hand of Fate was in it."

So perplexed was I by these speeches which held I thought, more than their superficial meaning (although what their true depth might be I could not guess) that I did not know how to proceed. I feared to say more than would seem rational or conventional, assuming that the count knew nothing, I feared on the contrary to say too little, assuming that he knew all. The situation was a difficult one; only time and tact evidently would clear it of its obscurities. Meanwhile, I considered that our best chance of arriving at a mutual understanding would be through an exchange of views upon psychic matters and turned often to the subject with the result of proving the count to be an

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avowed sceptic who took only the polite interest in the topic made necessary by my particularly affecting it ! I cannot say that the discovery was a great deception or surprise to me, as I had from the first suspected that he might not differ from other men in a disposition to apply the term “ nonsense ” to all forms of psychic phenomena.

It is more than likely that in the course of my efforts to divert the conversation into certain channels I referred often, and somewhat enigmatically, to “ my belief ”, for one day the count asked me, with a serious air ; “ What precisely, madame, is ‘ your belief ’ ? ”

A little surprised, although the glimpses I had given certainly led to the question, yet not prepared to make a clear or exhaustive answer, I was forced to temporise, and in spite of myself could not restrain a smile at the count’s expression when I announced, “ Oh, I am, in a sense, a ‘ Manichean ’ you know—as much Buddhist as Christian, as much Parsee as either ! ” and congratulating myself upon having slipped over the difficulty, and happily told a measure of the truth, I hastened to change the subject. I thought the count could have no other object in making the enquiry than that of friendly interest or curiosity, and was unaware that a rumour current in the world of my impending separation—society already said *divorce*—had in reality inspired his question.

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As I never mentioned my private misfortunes even to the closest friends, I had no reason to suppose that people knew or in general talked of them. Ferreira had every wish and every reason to keep the matter quiet, and although it was an open secret that we “did not get on”, we did not in that respect differ from a dozen other couples in our immediate circle. The rumour had, however, got about and soon reached the ears of the count.

“I cannot say what I thought, or perhaps *hoped* when I asked you that question,” he said to me long after. “I saw that you were surprised—but I particularly wished to know if you were a *Catholic* as I feared, from your Latin surname, you must be.”

Yet however great may have been his relief on hearing my singular profession of faith, it was more than equalised later by the embarrassing circumstance of its having been exactly what it was !

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The entertainments of that season—lacking Royalty—lacked much of the brilliancy of the previous summer but were, on that account only more gay and informal. The count and I—not altogether by chance—were thrown often together.

One August afternoon we were strolling about the lawns of one of the big houses and seating ourselves after a time in comfortable

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garden chairs in a pleasantly shaded spot, a liveried footman brought us out our tea. The count drank his in silence, gazing at me with a puzzled and abstracted air meanwhile. Finally he said :

"It is certain, madame, that I never saw you until quite recently and yet I seem to have known you always. It is a trite thing to say I know, but this is more than the impression that your *appearance* is familiar, for I seem to understand you, to know your nature and your tastes as well."

"Perhaps," I said, "you have known someone whom I resemble."

"You are very like a member of my own family, it is true, but that is not the source of my impression, for you and she are quite unlike in character."

"Who is it ?" I asked.

"It is one of my sisters," he continued, "I was much struck by the likeness on seeing you for the first time. Although you are fair and she is dark, you have the same features—the *nose* in particular is the same ; if it were not for the difference in colouring you and she might be sisters."

"I should so like to see her ; do show me a photo."

"I will, with pleasure. She is considered beautiful and it is said of her that 'she looks like an Egyptian Queen'—I hope you will not be displeased when you see her photograph."

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“ Displeased—how could I be ! I am very flattered, and *interested*, to hear of the likeness,” I said, as we rose to saunter back again towards the house.

“ Well, but you see— ” he half hesitated, “ she and I are said to look a good deal alike.”

“ Has it not reached your ears,” I asked, “ that you and *I* are said to look ‘ just like brother and sister ’ ? ”

“ I have heard it, of course ; ” he said, “ I wondered if you had, too ! ”

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After the zenith was reached, the rush abated and another Newport season was on the wane.

One of the last of the big parties, and one of the most amusing, was the dinner-dance given by the Hungarians to the friends and acquaintances who had entertained them during the summer. As we drove home, after the cotillion that wound up the dance, smothered in flowers, and carefully carrying the caged canaries which had been one of the many sets of unusual favours, most of us were obliged to admit that the three strangers had justified society’s first impressions of them in this endeavour to repay her hospitality in kind. And as Newport society was not spoilt in this respect we were duly impressed, for it had hitherto been almost invariably the custom of visiting “ foreigners ” to, figuratively speaking, “ eat and run ” !

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The three young counts also devised for us a new form of entertainment, and invited us often out into the country to dine in the open air to the strains of an excellent gipsy band. These *alfresco* evenings finally led to quite a craze for the weird and haunting folk-songs of Hungary, and at one point in the season we seemed literally to "live, move and have our being" to the sobbing of the cymbalom and the wailing of violins.

The Hungarians really provided a number of new impressions in the course of the summer, for a novel note was undoubtedly struck in the daily life of Newport by Varshonyi's appearance on Bellevue Avenue driving his trotting four-in-hand. It was harnessed and driven after the manner of his own country—a manner not familiar to Anglo-Saxon eyes—and what shocked us a little at first as being "so un-English", made later a strong appeal to our native love of the original and practical. All four of the horses were thoroughbred trotters, the vehicle a somewhat small and light one, and the speed attained seemed to a generation which had yet to make acquaintance with the motor-car, nothing less than terrific. A drive, in the circumstances, was quite in the nature of a sensation, and one by one most of the women of the younger set openly hinted, or asked outright, to be taken for a spin. There was always the elderly groom who sat behind to play propriety!

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After weeks of our tepid indoor life, the perpetual round of unseasonable amusements, I should have enjoyed such a drive in the glorious air that already towards evening was turning pleasantly autumnal, but the count never asked me to go, and my attitude was still too reserved to admit of my inviting myself. For the last days of August found us at much the same point of acquaintance as the first. We had met so often that a certain intimacy had naturally sprung up between us, and in common with the other women of our little set I had dropped his title in speaking and addressed him simply as "Varshonyi" but save by the allusions that I only perhaps imagined his speeches to contain, the subject of *sentiment* had never been approached by us.

If I look back upon that summer, during the whole of which the occupations of my outer life were so at variance with the interests of my life within, I seem to recall not the incidents of real life, but scenes from some play, or pageant, in which Béla and I fill our parts, in simulated indifference, amongst the other characters that throng the stage. But through and beneath it all there runs the melody of a wild Hungarian love-song, played softly, in passionate undertone, by dark-eyed gipsy musicians !

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On one of the last nights of my visit a particularly gay party was in progress at "Dream-

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hurst": this was a last wanton tribute to the flying season, and the fun was fast and furious. Oppressed by my own thoughts, the heat, as well as the somewhat forced and feverish gaiety within doors, I wandered out to the tented terrace, where we had previously supped, and down the steps into the garden. The count—as often now—moved at my side with the alert and easy step that was so personal to him and so uncommon.

We left behind us sounds of talk and laughter and the clatter of teacups, for a few hearty souls already enjoyed an early breakfast of tea and bacon on the terrace!

The shadow of a perfectly wordless misunderstanding had fallen between Varshonyi and myself on that evening. I felt rather than knew, the cause of it to be that he did not approve of the *costumes de fantaisie* in which the ladies had elected to appear, and that mine in particular had greatly displeased him. And it cannot be said that the result of our attempts to assume on this occasion the appearance and artless ways of infancy was a complete success. If we resembled "babies" in any sense, it was rather the type of the London music halls, and one had no need of second sight to perceive that we had again shocked the fastidious good taste of our foreign critics.

The count breathed no word, of course, of his impression, and we wandered down the length of the park which was not large, until

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we stood at the open gates. Then he spoke for the first time since we had left the house and asked, " Shall we go on ? "

" For a little way," I said. " It is so deliciously cool and quiet."

The house stood only some hundreds of yards from the sea, and on passing through the park gates, we turned to make our way slowly towards it. The early morning breeze struck fresh after the hectic atmosphere indoors, and I drew the lace scarf I had worn at supper on the terrace more closely around my shoulders.

We walked on without a word. I felt utterly miserable, and no doubt the admission was written on my tired face, for the count's voice again broke the silence.

" Poor little ' Zavar,' " he said, calling me by the odd nickname bestowed upon me by the three Hungarians ; and at sound of it I turned with a deep breath that was very like a sob to meet his look. For the first time in this life we were alone together ; as much alone in " that new world which is the old " as fabled Eve and Adam amid the dewy freshness of Eden. The solemn hush of the holy, early morning hours was over all, the first faint light of dawn crept up the sky, but a deeper light flamed up to meet it in our eyes and in one look each read the secret of the other's soul !

Did we in that moment speak as well ? I do not think so, but I do not know ; nor whether I remembered then, or afterward, having a year

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previously, and following a ball given in the same house, described the incident by a few lines scribbled on the back of a torn envelope exactly as it had now occurred.

Since stepping off the terrace I had been like one in a trance, but now my senses returned to me ; I realised where I was, what I was doing. Alarmed, I said : “ We must go back . . . I must go back at once. I shall be missed ! ” And we turned to hurry back, without a word as we had come, yet how different all the world looked to me now !

We entered the house as we had left it, by way of the terrace, and mingling with the few remaining dancers, I was relieved to find that my short absence had not been remarked.

The count soon afterward joined the group of which I was one, to say good-night, and as he took my hand for a moment asked me simply before the others : .

“ Will you drive with me to-morrow, madame ? ”

I hesitated—what ought I to do—or say ? But “ With pleasure, thank you,” was all that I could think of !

The count turned in at the gates with a dash, and the trotters flashed up the drive and past the windows of the drawing-room, where, at four o'clock on the following afternoon, I awaited his coming. The day was grey and overcast, not one for a long drive out into the peace of the quiet countryside, but we thought

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there might be time for a spin up and down the Ocean Drive before the rain came on.

There were few carriages on the Drive that afternoon ; we raced along at an alarming speed, and soon found ourselves at the Point.

" Shall we get down for a moment ? " asked the count as he threw the reins on to the backs of the trotters, bringing them to a sudden halt.

" For a moment, by all means," I said, for to my experience, it seemed that after the mad pace at which we had come the horses must need rest. We stepped down, therefore, climbed over the belt of rocks that fringed the sea, and stood on the brink, gazing out together.

With language neither complex nor varied at my command, I cannot hope to give an idea of the emotions of that hour, but they were certainly amongst the most poignant of my life.

Although my unseen friends had aided me most wonderfully in many ways, I had no reason to believe that I was destined by their help to attain to more than ultimate earthly freedom. As much, it seemed, to prove themselves to me as to prove to me that love was not dead on earth, I had been brought together with Splendira, yet we met after all, as " ships that pass in the night and speak each other in passing."

The count's face that afternoon was set and sad as I had never seen it ; he gazed out fixedly across the grim width of ocean as if he, too,

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thought how soon it must inexorably lie between us.

Great breakers rolled in sullenly and broke at our feet, a strong cold wind was blowing. I had slipped off my glove to put in place a wandering lock of hair, when my eyes chanced to fall upon my wedding ring. The sight of it filled me with a perfect passion of revolt ! In that moment I realised what the experiences of my wedded life had made of me—and then I *understood* ! Then I knew that no matter how golden might have been the promise of the future the memories of that wretched existence could never be cleansed away. In my helpless fury I tore from my finger the ring, token of a sanctified relation that proved as debasing in every influence as any vulgar *liaison*, and with all my strength threw it far out into the sea !

The count, who saw nothing but my brusque gesture turned to ask : “ What are you doing ? ” I tried to laugh as I answered : “ I am consigning old memories to the deep,” but in my heart I knew that such ghosts were hard to lay, that through all the years to be they must inevitably rise up, again and again, pale wraiths from out a watery grave, to mop and mow at me !

We turned without further speech and went back to the carriage ; as we drove home the darkness gathered swiftly, and before we reached the house rain had begun to fall.

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On the following evening I left Newport by night boat for New York ; we were a large party leaving and quite a crowd of our friends came to see us off. The count remained for a few minutes only, and having wished us *bon voyage* walked rapidly away.

I talked for some time longer with other friends, but went to my cabin when the steamer got under weigh. As I opened the door I caught my breath at the sight within—a fragrant mass of lilies-of-the-valley transformed my cabin into a perfect bower of loveliness !

“From Count Varshonyi,” said Marceline, handing me a visiting-card.

CHAPTER VIII

I RETURNED directly to the cottage at Tuxedo, and after entertaining a few guests again found myself alone there. Feeling but ill-attuned to solitude, longing, indeed, for human companionship and "someone to talk to," I sent a line to Prudence begging her to come to me. In response to my summons she presently appeared, and we resumed the old order of our retired life, speaking much as formerly of things psychic, but rather more of the personal interests of the recent summer. As I had never attempted to "write" after the experience of the night on which I had recognised Splendira in the casino ball-room, and Prudence had abandoned her attempts on returning to her home duties, we did not try to resume our work at this time. But in the spring, during her first visit, I had put aside certain writings which were of a prophetic nature, and it was now of great interest to us to verify them and to note that during the intervening months all had "come true" without exception.

Prudence, however, was by nature prudent ; she declined to commit herself and viewed the

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proofs of her inspiration with the greatest scepticism.

"Why are you so difficult to convince?" I asked her half impatiently.

"Because," she said, "I cannot persuade myself that my own ideas do not—by a quite unconscious process certainly—play some part in the composition of the messages."

"Work, then!" I said, "and convince yourself that a difference exists between your own thoughts and the ideas suggested to you from without."

"I am sorry to think," she persisted, "that I never could be sure. The method is so involved—a doubt would always trouble me. But if, for example, I were to *see* something—something rather unusual or extraordinary—I should be satisfied, for if no other sense, I can trust my own *sight* at least!"

As I was not an experienced "see-er" and had indeed a secret dread of "seeing things" that I knew to be ridiculous and cowardly, I could offer no suggestion as to the means by which she might "call spirits from the vasty deep," and the subject was allowed to drop.

About a week later Prudence and I sat alone after dinner in the "hall" of the cottage, the largest of the rooms and the one we most frequented. She whose fingers were never idle was fashioning some small garment for a dearly-loved tiny girl at home, and sat within the circle of lamplight that cast a golden radiance round

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her bowed head and the bright masses of her lovely hair. Beyond, in semi-obscurity, I reclined, as usual, on the cushions of the big divan.

I was watching Prudence lazily through half-closed lids, when suddenly she sat upright, dropped her work and the hands that held it to her knees, and fixing me with her direct gaze, said : " My dear, I must tell you a very extraordinary thing."

" Yes ? " I murmured sleepily ; " then tell."

" It happened this morning for the second time—I really don't know what to think of it ! "

" What happened ? " I asked, rousing myself a little.

" A few days ago," she began, with an abstracted air, and the fixed gaze of one who looks within, " and again this morning, I awoke suddenly—or was awakened—just before daylight and standing in the front window of my bedroom I saw *a man* ! "

" My dear, good girl ! " I protested, but without heeding the interruption she continued :

" Such a strange figure ; tall and thin, wearing a long brown robe and an odd high cap—like a magician in a fairy tale ! His arms were raised up, so," and suiting the action to the word, Prudence raised her arms and hands for a moment to their full length above her head, with her palms turned outward and fingers extended. " I could see him and everything near him quite

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distinctly—the chairs, the curtains, and the writing-table—and while he stood there I felt as if I were under some strange spell ! My brain was perfectly clear, but otherwise I seemed not to exist, or to be utterly paralysed. I knew that my eyes were fixed, and that I could not move them if I tried, yet, strangely enough, I was not frightened in the least, only very much interested and amazed. At the same time I heard a sound—an odd, soft sound—and on both mornings it was repeated twice.”

“ What was it like ? ” I asked, all breathless attention.

“ Oh, it was not like an actual *word* at all, and I can hardly *say* it ; it was slow and musical, almost like a chord struck upon the strings of a harp—but I thought it sounded rather like ‘ Su-u-undari ! Su-u-undari ! ’ But why ”—she broke off abruptly—“ do you look like that ? ” For, absorbed in telling her story she had not until that moment observed my amazed interest nor that I now sat bolt upright staring at her with wide eyes.

Memories of that singular visitation on the Nile came trooping back to me, for during the two years which had since elapsed all thought of the adventure had faded from my mind. I had indeed, soon after its occurrence, consigned it to oblivion as an erratic incident in which I had played an absurd part—and yet terrified a steamer-load of harmless tourists !

My travels in Egypt were followed by a period

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during which I had found no time for indulging in futile reminiscences, and later, in all the course of my work, not a word had ever appeared to recall, much less to explain, the incident.

Great, therefore, was my astonishment on being again confronted, although through other eyes, by the strange eastern figure and to hear Prudence describe my visitant, even to details of costume and attitude, exactly as I myself had seen him on the Nile! I lost no time in relating my story of the apparition and we were able to agree, in happiest unanimity, that the circumstances were even rather more than "very extraordinary."

We sat up to discuss the matter until long past the bedtime hour of our simple life, without arriving at any satisfactory conclusions.

"Only one thing is certain," I said at last, "that our Egyptian, whoever he may be, is a spirit, or personality, of great power, and also a *friend*. He became visible to you in response to your wish to *see*—but I should really love to know from whence you summoned him! Was it all the way from Egypt, or has he been here all the time?"

"As if I knew," murmured Prudence.

"At all events," I continued, as I rose and shook up my pillows, while Prudence folded and laid aside her work for the night, "you behaved with more dignity than I did on a similar occasion, and I thank you that you did not arouse the neighbours by your shrieks. I

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cannot, however, allow myself to be thus out-done, for I am here at home ! ” And going to my desk I took a bit of paper, and half in earnest half in a spirit of fun, wrote on it : “ I beg of you to make this house your home.”

“ There ! ” I exclaimed gaily, showing it to Prudence who, in spite of herself, looked shocked at my levity, “ you see—I place it conspicuously upon this desk, oblivious to what our imported English servants, who, however, rarely dust, may think of it in the morning, and thus I make amends for my former lack of cordiality ! ”

I thereupon lighted and gave Prudence her bedroom candle, and with my own in hand followed her up the stairs.

When we met again, after breakfasting in our respective rooms, it was mutually to regret that the night had passed in peaceful sleep, and that even the hours of dawn had not been marked by manifestations of any kind.

I was not surprised, but Prudence was much disappointed. Never having travelled beyond the confines of her own country and unfamiliar with the types and costumes of the East, she had been profoundly impressed by the striking appearance of the Egyptian, and I rejoiced to see that the apparition had served to mould her wavering interest into such conviction as I had long hoped might be hers.

“ Perhaps,” I said, “ the demonstrations were made with the object of convincing you and will not occur again.”

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"It may be so," she said, "for convinced I am at last. But perhaps," she continued, with just a shade of austerity, "you did not approach the subject in quite a serious spirit last night."

"Perhaps I didn't," I admitted mildly, perceiving that she was smitten with the same dark suspicion that once afflicted me; and realising the hopelessness of persuading her to take a more natural view of the circumstances at that stage of her wonderment, I thought it best to change the subject, and as we started for our morning walk we turned to the consideration of more mundane things.

Later in the day, a short time after lunch, we sat chatting idly in the hall. At least I chatted idly, while Prudence, as usual, plied a busy needle; but she now shared my seat on the divan, to be under the light of the window, and thus we both sat facing the length of the room.

Presently our conversation languished, and I was overtaken by a feeling of uneasiness. Then I became aware that an attack of the violent and disagreeable nervous tremors, always premonitory of a demonstration upon lines with which I am unfamiliar, was impending.

A quarter of an hour passed slowly and in silence, and I realised that we were no longer alone in occupation of the hall—that a tall and stately figure was dimly taking shape at the farther end! This became more and more visible by degrees, extremely clear and luminous at last, and the Egyptian stood before us!

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Not, however, in the strange attitude of invocation in which we had both previously seen him.

I look in vain for words to describe the curiously real and yet ethereal quality of this apparition which was vague—in that it had no definite outline—and yet vivid. It had life and virility, highly spiritualised, but although lacking a certain density or material solidity was not transparent. I cannot say, either, which of our actual senses were engaged in perceiving it. We seemed to see with eyes alone, yet there was a strong impression that mere human sight did not suffice and that some finer, supernormal sense had wakened to an effort. It is impossible for me to express myself more clearly on this subject; you must understand that when I speak hereafter of “seeing” it was always with this double-sense to which I can give no name.

With the exception of the visions of the first period of my instruction, which were in the nature of pictures within a luminous oval with figures much reduced in size, I had had no experience of a visible demonstration since the one erratic instance on the Nile when I had seen the same tall Egyptian standing beside me in my cabin. A certain measure of the terror to which I had then yielded returned to me, and I trembled so violently that I could make no attempt to speak. It fell to Prudence, therefore, to break the silence although she was unaware as she did so if I were conscious of the presence or not.

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"The Egyptian is here," she said in a low, startled tone. I answered between chattering teeth : " Yes, I know—I can see him."

Our mysterious visitor, having materialised before our amazed and fascinated sight, appeared to ignore us, and moved noiselessly about at his end of the hall, where several antique Oriental objects seemed to attract his attention. His attitude was plainly that of one who waits to be received and made welcome, yet Prudence and I continued to gaze alternately at each other and upon our guest until, conscious of our awkwardness, we tried for very shame to avoid each other's eyes.

The situation assumed a distinctly humorous aspect ; I had inconsequently addressed an invitation to a great personage who had surprised me by arriving before I could inform myself as to the etiquette and ceremonies proper to his reception ! My nerves were now beyond any effort of control : I became quite hysterical, and began to laugh—thus sharing undoubtedly in our visitor's impressions of us at that moment ! At sounds of a mirth which I, nevertheless, tried decently to smother, Prudence turned her eyes in my direction and asked in a low voice, but with some asperity : " Why do you laugh ? "

" I can't help it," I whispered tremulously ; " we are so ridiculous ! He is here in response to our invitation and we don't know what to do."

" It was *your* invitation," she said with her

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usual exactitude. "Why don't you do something?" And not wishing to admit that I was unequal to rising to the suggestion, I did not reply, and we continued furtively to observe the slightly restless movements of our guest.

Presently we noticed that the Egyptian was leaving his end of the hall and coming slowly towards us. Prudence and I reached out with one accord to grasp each other's cold and trembling fingers: then, leaning forward with staring eyes, we watched his majestic advance. The nervous tension was terrible, until we realised that our visitor meant to go no further than the embrasure of the big window, at some little distance from us, where he stopped, and laid one hand upon my desk.

Then Prudence spoke again, in a whisper: "Do you still see him?" she asked.

"Yes," I said, "I wonder if you see him where I do."

"He stands by your desk," she answered, "and I think he wants you to write."

I, too, felt that this was his wish, and rising at once made my way towards the window, impelled by some volition stronger than my own. As I advanced, however, the figure seemed to recede or dissolve before me, and when I reached the desk had, from my view, *disappeared!* Prudence, however, who did not stir from her place during the whole of this experience, could see the tall form—as she told me later—bending over my chair as I wrote.

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Seated at my desk I seized the first paper to hand—which happened to be the block of club “Complaint Forms”—and dipping my pen in ink began hurriedly to write. Agitated and confused, but in a spirit of apology, I scribbled : “We are glad to see you here and I hope that you will remain long with us.” My hand gathered force, the writing changed, and without a pause continued : “I thank you for your hospitality, but my sojourn must be a brief one, my stay on earth has already been too long ; my life-work was ended with the conversion of a modern woman.” There was a pause. I asked in thought, “Are you he whom I saw on the Nile ? ”

“Yes.”

“Will you tell me your name ? ”

“My name is only this, SUNDRA, for Mabel my mother was an Indian woman of the people, a half-caste, and my father’s name was never known to me. He left her with a little boy to support and care for, but she—because she was too poor to live well, and too ignorant of love’s laws to realise that even I, a bastard child, had been the good God’s gift to her—took me to the river and laid me by the shore, for there was murder, dear one, in the heart of her who should have brought me every care. Her father was aware of what she had done, and ere the day had dawned I was safe hidden in the folds of the loose garment that he wore. He bore me to the priest of Zoroaster, and that good soul, because

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he hid a father's heart within the shrunken form bowed down by long looking into the stores of science, gave me a home and sustenance.

"When I was ten years old we went to a strange land to see another priest, a friend of Amra, who was at once my father, my mother and my all. We sheltered at the fall of night within the rocky caves of the mountains in the north-western part of India. When we had reached the cave where dwelt the sage whose teaching we had come to profit by, my guide, my protector and my friend, the dear old soul of Amra, passed through the portals of the grave into a better world beyond, and I was left, a stranger child, to bide with the half-pagan, half-civilised wizard or conjuror, who practised the arts of magic and taught amongst his fellows in that far country of the East.

"His hair grew low upon his brow, and drooped upon his breast ; his eyes beneath this shaggy mane, however, were piercing, bright and clear. Maybe he was one of the first rank or caste, for he frequently left us, who were at once his bondsmen, friends and pupils, and travelled far into the East, and once we were surprised at what he brought back with him—a tiny child."

From the first line of the story I was struck by the bold familiar character of the handwriting, and was still more impressed when, on reaching the name, I was made to form the first letter

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by one clear swinging stroke into a large symmetrical "S." From these things I know, as well as from the extreme facility with which I wrote, that I was in the presence of the most sympathetic and powerful of my hitherto unseen instructors, writing, as often before, under his direct personal guidance. My heart beat high at thought of knowing something of his life and history, of receiving his visible presence in my home. I wrote on, absorbed, in unbroken silence, suddenly shattered by a ring at the bell. A few moments later a servant brought me a note requiring an immediate answer, the spell, alas, was broken, and I was never able to pick up the thread nor to resume the story !

CHAPTER IX

AFTER this intensely interesting experience I was too agitated to think of sleep, and spent the hours of night reading and pondering over the Story of Sundra, greatly bewildered that a highly powerful Indian adept—such as our Egyptian proved to be—should have come to help me by his teaching.

Was this done as a duty, I wondered, or as a final *penance*—or had he been working in an experimental and scientific spirit only? I did not think so, and the more I thought of it, the more I was impelled to believe that there was some element of human interest or sentiment in the affair. From the first, I had been irresistibly attracted to the personality of this mysterious friend and instructor, and felt that a strong tie of sympathy existed between us, yet why it should be so unless we had met before in this or other lives I could not understand.

I had never known anyone resembling the Master in this life; neither did he figure in any of my strange, dim memories, and sometimes awful impressions, of long past lives and tragedies. What was I, then, to him, or he to me?

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I read and re-read his story, but it contained—to my eyes—no answer to the questions. I longed to write that I might learn of these things as well as to disprove the menace of the lines that read like a farewell: “My sojourn must be a brief one; my stay on earth has already been too long.”

But although I sat at my desk and waited, watchful, listening, until the gray dawn rose, not one word did I either write or hear. Disappointed and sad at heart, I crept away at last to bed, too blind to see, too dull to understand, the answer that lay plainly written before my eyes the whole night through!

Prudence, who suspected my intention to keep vigil, and had herself passed a wakeful night, came early to hear of the results, and on learning that there were none to relate, experienced a disappointment almost equal to my own.

It may be imagined, therefore, with what a medley of emotions we welcomed the reappearance of Sundra on the afternoon of that same day—and on *all the twelve days that followed*, at about the same hour!

We were surprised beyond measure, interested and fascinated, but we were also bewildered and too greatly overawed.

We moved, half-dazed, I think, through the period always spoken of afterward as the “wonderful fortnight”—without ever fully realising how great the wonder of our situation

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was, and we soon became so accustomed to the Master's appearance, to the sympathetic and silent, yet highly animated, personality, moving so easily about the house, that at every prolonged absence we fell into great alarm lest he should not return.

It is pleasant to record that when our first sense of *gêne* in this unusual relationship was past—for it is somewhat disconcerting to live in daily association with a visible being who can read your every thought!—we were at least intelligent enough to understand that the noble and beautiful appearance of our guest was the harmonious outward expression of his nature.

The materialisations varied greatly, however, in visibility from day to day. Sometimes the figure of magic, in its strange attire, was only a *presence*, dimly seen and mystic. At other times, as if moved by the simplicity of our natures, the Master bent to us and became almost as visible as any mortal; as if he wished to dispel by a more intimate aspect the cloud of superstition with which we surrounded him, and which obscured our intelligence to the very end.

It was on these occasions that Prudence and I were able to observe, and later in private to exchange impressions of, every detail of his appearance and of many of his personal ways.

Sundra was above the average height of man, lean and sinewy, with broad shoulders and slender waist, the height and slim lines giving dignity and distinction to the figure—an effect

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enhanced by the long garment that he wore. This fitted closely above the waist and fell in slightly flaring lines nearly to the ground. Close-fitting sleeves came well over the slim wrists ; only the long-fingered and most expressive hands emerged.

Throughout the experience this robe or tunic appeared invariably of a tawny, brownish shade, although *white*, we thought, would have been more figurative and suitable, being unaware that, in the symbology of the East, "*the traveller wears brown*—that the dust of the journey may not show upon his garments."

The turban was rather large, but carefully folded and most artfully draped—lower at one side than on the other—with very smart effect. We never agreed as to the colour : Prudence saw "pure white," and to me the effect was changeful, or opalescent with shades of blue and rose. But above the clear intensity of the face the colours showed always blurred.

If I were to try for a hundred years I should never succeed in giving a true impression of the Master's face—nor of the wonder aroused within us by the mystery of it !

Highly human and sympathetic, it yet differed from any human countenance, even the most exalted, that I have ever seen. I can only say : "So look the immortals," and this aspect is not one for my halting and inexperienced pen to describe.

With our superficial outer senses we could

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see the face was in shape a pure oval with features of faultless regularity—unless the mouth was a shade too thin-lipped and firmly set—and the expression calm and thoughtful without the least austerity.

But there was no look of vapid “goodness” on the Master’s face ; on the contrary it was often very vivacious, and being free from all the heavy lines that mar so many human faces, seemed, with the smooth cheeks and clear brown skin, to have every appearance of youth. The eyes were extremely long and large, brilliant and heavily lashed, and the most extraordinary features of the face—quite apart from their actual beauty—for therein lay the intent and concentrated look that I shall make no effort to analyse or describe, as it was altogether strange to us, outside of our experience and beyond our comprehension.

And not the eyes alone, but the whole aspect seemed charged with high energy, some strong psycho-magnetic quality that was held in check or consciously directed, as the Master willed. We were then, as now, far from understanding the exact nature of this element and only felt instinctively that it might easily become terrible in the cause of right and flash out, keen and pitiless, like a sword, to smite or to destroy !

It was, no doubt, the effect upon our nerves of the very positive vibrations controlling us that induced the odd, slightly tremulous sensation that we always defined as “awe.” Even

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now I cannot say how this power was directed upon us, nor if it was only through the *eyes*, but there were times when their look was so intense that they seemed almost to detach themselves from the face—to be not only of it, but strangely apart from it! It was when the Master's appearance became thus weird and unearthly that our finer, supernormal senses woke, and for a too-brief space we could see with clearer vision and with deeper insight than ever at other times. Then, in wonder, we bowed down in spirit, while a faint, strange fragrance—as of distant, unfamiliar flowers—seemed to tremble in the air about us!

Confused as we were by the situation and blind to its possibilities, mystified through our ignorance and want of even elementary logic, we could rise no higher than our own natures throughout the whole of this amazing affair. We made no conscious effort to assist the demonstrations—on the contrary, we disturbed and discouraged them by our agitation—and contributed nothing, from first to last, except the pure devotion of our very simple souls.

We know now that when Sundra came to offer us the fruits of knowledge gained by long and arduous endeavour, he did so in no misapprehension as to our capacities, but as a final act of *love*. But there was, perhaps, a faint hope that after the instruction received beneath his hand, I might arise in some moment of illumination to grasp the gift that he bent down to give.

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We cannot doubt that he wished to familiarise us with his presence and gain our confidence, and after stimulating our interest by the more obvious demonstrations, to lead to written instructions and verbal intercourse.

Alas ! We failed at every point and never, by one gleam of comprehension, helped to this end !

What vistas might have opened before our sight, what heights might we have gained, or flights have dared, if we had been more cultivated, quicker of intuition, or even less afflicted with an absurd nervousness at the mere suggestion of any new experience !

That the Master never became impatient of our density nor wearied by our primitive attitude of blind adoration was probably due to the fact that we *amused* him ! His great eyes often glowed with mirth, and never more unmistakably than when through surprise, or alarm, we underwent some comical change of expression—or “transmutation of our auric colours” !

Shortly after sunset, as the dusk of the short autumn days drew in, the apparition always faded to a luminous shadow that lingered near the open door. Then it seemed to us that the Master awaited some sign or signal, for, as the stars came out one by one, he vanished from our sight, never, during the evening or the night, to reappear.

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The question of our visitor's identity was, from the first, the subject of continual speculation. We felt that until this enigma was solved the object of his presence was not to be explained.

In this connection I had an interesting personal experience—although years elapsed before I perceived its application. Several times during the “wonderful fortnight” I was troubled by a strange and dreadful *dream*. In the course of it I lost all sense of time, circumstances and surroundings—I knew nothing but that I carried a naked brown baby in my arms! It was straight-limbed and strongly built, a healthy, handsome child. I loved it dearly and held it close, but it was heavy—so heavy—in my arms! I was stumbling along a rough and broken road in utter darkness, and the sleeping child grew always heavier. Suddenly it was gone—and I awoke, with an agony of pain at my heart, to find that I stretched out empty arms into the silent night! There were reasonable explanations, in my case, for the dreaming of such dreams. They had to do with the intimate sorrows of my life, stirred from their depths, as I believed, by the Story of Sundra, which had made a great impression on my mind. But as I never mentioned these very personal griefs, I did not speak of the dream to Prudence who might have suggested a more obvious interpretation. I had never been willing to admit that my sleeping dreams, unaccountable

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as they often were, could be due to other causes than my own impressions or conditions of health, and did not look for another explanation.

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During the second week of our experience I received a note from Varshonyi to say that he had been invited to spend the week-end at Tuxedo and hoped to find me at home there as he was expecting to sail for Europe very shortly. Also, that he intended to drive from town with the four-in-hand, and would, with my permission, drop in at the cottage for tea as he passed by.

Prudence and I arranged the flowers on that Saturday morning with more than our usual care. Special tea-cakes were prepared, and at five o'clock the curtains were drawn, the lamps brought in, and all was ready for the count's reception.

Sundra came earlier on that day, just at high noon, and the memory of his aspect is fresh in my heart to this hour.

Faint and ethereal at first, as if the Master stood afar off, exalted and aloof, the materialisation cleared slightly as the day wore on. Even then the figure was only indicated, although the turban showed, as always, palely opalescent.

The face was pure and transparent in colouring, but extremely clear, and the expression more than ever inscrutable as being less positive than usual, less assured. It might almost have

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been said to gleam changefully, with varying shades of feeling, impossible then to define, for here was not only the joy of one who, with a last high act of devotion accomplished passes exulting upon his way, but the regret of long separation, and pity for those who lingered in ignorance and sorrow upon the road.

Quite late in the afternoon the Master's figure became clearer, his colouring more vivid, and in the mysterious hour *entre chien et loup* he made no move to vanish as was his custom, into the gloaming light without, but lingered, luminous and beautiful, in the hall, as if with us he awaited the count's arrival.

Beloved Master, why did you not on that evening speak to us, or write? I was nervous and abstracted, or even my dull senses had been keener!

I knew the speed and mettle of the horses with which Béla proposed to make the journey, and greatly feared that some accident had occurred, for it was nearly eight o'clock when we finally heard the distant, rhythmical beat of trotting hoofs. This grew always louder, drew nearer and nearer, and stopped suddenly at the foot of our stone stairway—a moment later the count was at the door.

A servant was waiting to admit him, and as he entered and we went forward to welcome him, I saw that a tall and turbaned figure stood by his side. Then Sundra, the Adept, towered to an unfamiliar height, and the intensity of his

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expression was such that my heart quailed at sight of him ! So he stood for an instant, stately, compelling in his beauty, then he bent his head quickly as if he would speak in the count's ear, and he was gone—only a breath of strangely scented eastern flowers was wafted to us like a blessing and hovered for a moment in the air !

CHAPTER X

PRUDENCE and I naturally wished to hear of the misadventures which had delayed the count's arrival, and he was telling us of these in his soft, broken English, when dinner was announced. We begged him to remain as it was too late for him to go on to the club and dress and join his friends, and as we ourselves were in "*petite tenue*," he stopped to share our simple meal, but left almost immediately after to look at his horses, one of which had suffered greatly during the latter part of the journey which, by a wrong turn, had been made many hours longer than was anticipated. As we shared his anxiety for the poor creature, he promised to drop in at tea-time on Sunday to give us news of her.

I thought, in secret dread, that the Sunday afternoon visit would be one of farewell, until the count told us that he did not intend to leave on the following morning, but to stop until the end of the week at the club.

Every day thereafter he ran in at some time to see us, and usually soon after lunch when he knew that we were always to be found at

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home. He spoke several times admiringly of the cottage interior and having one afternoon asked my permission to look about, invaded the tiny drawing-room to examine the treasures of my *vitrine*, and wandered about the hall later looking at the Oriental objects and bits of drapery there.

Seeing the count thus intimately amid the familiar surroundings, we were puzzled, as daily since his arrival, by the strange coincidence of his resemblance to *Sundra*—yet, wherein it lay we could not at first discover.

The two differed in height, as in features, colouring and costume. Except for a certain similarity of line, and the air of distinction peculiar to highly-bred people of pure race, there seemed to be no point of resemblance between them, and yet in a subtle way they were curiously alike.

Often, when exchanging impressions, Prudence and I had remarked that there was something very personal and fascinating about the manner in which *Sundra moved*—he was so lithe and graceful in figure, so alert, but never abrupt, in all his ways. We had now to repeat this comment, which I myself had made, and frequently heard, in Newport, concerning the count! We found that they moved in exactly the same way, quickly, easily, and with assurance; and that their rare gestures, although free and animated, were never careless, inharmonious, or brusque.

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This charming and expressive manner showed natural vivacity, restrained by the innate consideration that was extended to all humble and even *inanimate* things. In a developed aspect this quality becomes Charity for All ; and that they possessed this rare virtue in common was made clear by their strange resemblance—an impression that I could easily verify in my knowledge of Splendira's nature.

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Before the count left Tuxedo he asked if he might have a long talk with me, and came in on Sunday, the last day of his visit, to lunch with us. Prudence soon afterwards went away "to write letters" and Béla and I were left alone together.

I should advance the story but little by repeating our conversation of that afternoon. Béla's object in seeking it had been to ask me to become his wife when I had regained my freedom. "But if," he said at last, "the obstacles between us prove insurmountable, I will not live without you. Be assured that I shall return in some form to be near you!"

"Then I will come to join you," I told him.

"For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
The black minute's at end,
And the elements rage, the fiend voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,

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Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
Then a light, then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul ! I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest ! ” *

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A fortnight later Varshonyi sailed for Europe. Prudence and I lunched with him at the Waldorf on that day, and when we parted at the door in full view of a numerous public, it was only with the vaguest hope on either side that we should meet in the course of this earthly life again.

I travelled back to Tuxedo utterly disconsolate, for Prudence, too, had been called away. Her visit had been several times prolonged at my earnest request, but her departure was this time made imperative by the illness of one of the little cousins who had contracted some childish ailment in her absence.

Alone, in straitened circumstances, and with only the saddest outlook upon the future, I clung always to the hope that my unseen friends would not desert me, and would in their own time bring light out of the darkness that enveloped me—still they were very silent. I had made several attempts to resume my writing, but without success, and by degrees I had been forced to abandon the hope that Sundra would appear or speak again.

A strange calm, as of expectancy, a foreboding

* Robert Browning.

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of something distressing and disagreeable in the air about me, chilled me and made me afraid. I awaited news of Béla, for I had received from him only a few lines written on passing through Paris, and I fancied that my premonitions pointed to what the nature of that news would be.

When he sailed it was with the object of talking with his family and making known his wishes but I had few illusions as to the manner in which this idea of the oldest son and scion of a house devoutly Catholic for hundreds of years to marry a *divorced* woman would be received.

Failing the permission upon which our future depended (for I would not hear of Varshonyi acting in opposition to the wishes of his family) we could do nothing but embark upon the forlorn attempt to reach each other on some higher plane.

Béla's parting and only gift to me had been a tiny black revolver ; it bore the words "*Tue toi,*" and it was loaded, I knew. I had, however, lived too long at other times with the idea of self-destruction, to be appalled by it now, and although I had no morbid desire for death, having come to see that a human life might be both happy and beautiful, I still did not shrink from it with any particular dread.

At this time a new figure made an appearance in the cottage, and I lived literally in the shadow, if not in actual fear, of Death. My first sight of this grim personage I shall never forget ;

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I awoke one night after a few hours of sleep to find the moonlight streaming through the open casement full into my room. At the end of a gleaming shaft that shot across it, where it fell upon the corner fireplace of my bedroom, stood the figure of a knight in full suit of silver armour, with visor closed. Behind him, filling the moonbeam and merging finally into the silvery shadows of the night, were thousands upon thousands of precisely similar grey forms, all with their blank and eyeless masks turned upon me !

The air of the clear October night struck cold : I was shaken by an icy terror. " Who are these ? " I cried aloud as I sat up in my bed, and from the corner a dull and muffled voice answered : " The Hosts of Death."

The Hosts of Death ! I thought that if they had arisen in their myriads to confront me it could only be because our hopes were doomed to disaster, and Béla and I must soon go out to join this masked and grisly throng—the Suicides ! But perhaps with them we might find a welcome !

The " grey knight " became from that hour a dim but always perceptible presence in my home, and in his chill and silent company the weeks wore slowly on.

Absorbed in a love which, although requited, seemed hopeless of any save a most tragic end, I spent the month of October in the cottage. The weather was cold and wet : I had no

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interests to take me up to town, nor even the incentive of work in my tiny garden to take me out of doors, for it lay brown and dead. Only a few belated blossoms of the pallid cosmos still starred it with their frail and fading beauty. I thought myself as wretched as mortal woman could be until the day that Ferreira returned unannounced to the cottage.

I cannot speak too briefly of this experience ; Ferreira settled himself with the evident intention of remaining, and ignoring the terms of our agreement, tried by every means, to break down my resistance. I took refuge in a guest-room and lived in greater fear of life than death. Goaded at last, however, to desperation I gave rein to elements long pent and controlled within my nature, and after a scene of almost brutal violence Ferreira sailed for Europe.

As if some long anticipated crisis were past, some new point of departure gained, my "Patient Scribe"—the oracle long silent—now came to my aid and picking up the thread of our old relation began again to write. I found a certain comfort in his invisible companionship and we worked much together as formerly. I tried to learn from him all that I desired so intensely to know concerning Sundra, but upon this subject he was noncommittal always, and all that he would write was the one word : "Read." When I begged to be told *what*, the answer was : "Wait". I wrote the

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words many times before I realised that I must find the clue to the mystery.

I knew nothing of India, a country I had never visited, but I bought books upon the subject and borrowed others, and was as much in the dark, except in the matter of general information, as I had been before.

The unseen friend was more communicative, however, on the subject of my own affairs which he directed with great decision. He seemed concerned for my health at the time—I was moody and depressed and brooding too much for my good—and he sent me out often into the air. When at home, I was set the task of ordering the affairs of the house and packing up my keepsakes and little personal effects. Thus engaged the time passed more quickly, and presently, almost without knowing it, I had put everything in readiness for my departure.

I can hardly expect you, who have never passed through such experiences, to understand how anyone of ordinary strength of character could become so entirely dependent upon the will of another as I did at this, and other periods, of my story. But I was amenable by nature, without being an absolute idiot, or I should not have been fitted for the work, and I was controlled throughout by highly positive and powerful agents. Moreover, my lessons in Blind Obedience did not end with such trivial incidents as I have here recorded but continued

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through a number of curious and most convincing experiences in the course of which my confidence had been completely won. If I was reluctant at times, and even obstinate, I never ventured actually to resist my instructors and you will presently see that if this had not been the case, and I had proved unruly at just this crisis, our story would never have been written, for Béla and I must certainly have perished.

Having, therefore, set my house in order I questioned the scribe as to my next step. "What shall I do now?" I enquired.

"Go up to town and see your doctor," was the answer, and I obediently went. The doctor was shocked by my appearance. "You're only the ghost of yourself," he said. "What have you been doing?"

I told him.

"You need a change," he said; "a complete change of air and scene. I advise you to go abroad for a time. Go to the mountains somewhere and live in the open air."

Nothing was farther from my thoughts than going to Europe. My means would not permit it, and I was anxious to begin the proceedings which were to give me back my freedom.

On my return to Tuxedo, therefore, I again questioned the "Patient Scribe." "And now what shall I do?" I asked.

"Go to Europe," he wrote.

"But my dear friend," I protested, "it

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would be extremely inconvenient to go now ; I am very short of money and I hate to ask papa ! ”

To this no answer.

“ Couldn’t I get through with this disagreeable law business first and go later ? ”

Again no answer.

“ Then—as you *insist* !—when must I go ? ”

“ You may sail in a fortnight.” And the matter was settled without further argument.

Only a few days after this was decided, I received my first long letter from Varshonyi who wrote that he had met with no success in his enterprise and seemed in a gloomy and pessimistic mood. I answered at once telling him that I had been ordered abroad and meant to go to a quiet cure-resort of which I knew in the Tyrol, where we might meet and speak again of our plans.

That night, as in a dream, I saw the departure of the Grey Knight and his hosts. The moonlight and the figures appeared as before ; the knight stood again by the fireplace with visor closed. Then, as at some signal or word of command, the host of his followers turned and, like a great rippling wave of silver, streamed out and away until all had vanished and only the empty light of the moonbeam was left to flood the room and the solitary figure of the knight in armour. He raised one mailed hand high before his face in a strange gesture of salute, and then he, too, was gone !

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About a fortnight later Béla sat one day at his desk in the morning-room of his country house in far away Hungary. Beside him lay a revolver, and a cable message addressed to me to say that he did not see the slightest hope of bringing our affair to the desired end and would "be with me in the dawn." It was the preconcerted announcement of his death and signal for my own.

He was busily engaged in the destruction of letters and papers when there was a knock at the door; he opened it and the post-bag was handed in.

Amongst the letters one that he awaited from New York told him of my intention to sail for Europe on a certain date, already past. This letter brought a change of thought—a *hope*. We should meet again at least, and something might still be arranged! He would bring me together with a trusted elder member of his family who would surely be able to arrive at a clearer view of the situation through a personal interview with me—meanwhile, we were to meet!

He tore up the cable message and put the revolver back into its case.

CHAPTER XI

ON a bitterly cold and windy afternoon about a week before Christmas, I set sail from New York, and from motives of economy, on a small steamer of obsolete type belonging to the Transatlantique Line. The prognostications for the crossing were not bright ; the ship was old, unsteady, and rat-infested, the company uninteresting. A few French commercial people, and a number of unsophisticated family parties, rejoicing in the glorious possibilities of their " first trip abroad."

Papa and Prudence came to wish me " God-speed " and wave a last farewell, and by his natural assumption that I was setting forth attended by my maid as usual, the former spared me what could only have been a difficult explanation. Prudence was, however, in the secret, and shared my nervousness at thought of the voyage.

By no means of an independent character, I had never travelled farther alone than from New York to Tuxedo, and I was besides, a wretched sailor under all conditions, even the most favourable. *Alone* in reality I never was,

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I knew, but I did not believe that the "friendly shades" who were nearby could help me to support the physical discomfort of the journey—that I must endure as best I could.

When my belongings were unpacked and my cabin in order for the voyage, I went on deck and sat or strolled about for several hours absorbed in reflections which were not, despite my rather forlorn position, altogether dark ones. I had met with an unexpected piece of information in the letter, written by Ferreira from Rome, which by good fortune reached me just a few days before the steamer sailed. He said :

"As I see that you are determined to persist in your intention I shall not oppose your wishes any longer. *If you desire to bring your suit in the State of New York I am willing to furnish the necessary evidence.* As we were not married in the Roman Catholic Church, no divorce in that church will be necessary."

I passed over the amiable cynicism of his offer, to stand amazed at the later lines. So Ferreira—following the faith of his *father*—was a Catholic and I had never even suspected it! I knew nothing of the law of the Roman Church beyond the one fact that persons of the faith are not permitted, without special dispensation, to remarry after having been divorced, and although I by no means realised to what extent, I believed the circumstances would tend to mitigate the difficulties facing

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Varshonyi and myself, as he had more than hinted that the question of *religion* was likely seriously to complicate our situation with the members of his family.

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The voyage was highly unpleasant and tempestuous throughout: we met rough weather from the start, and a few days out ran into a fearful storm. The little ship, trembling in every beam for her fate, plunged desperately ahead; the passengers drooped one by one and disappeared from view, but amongst the survivors—soon a mere handful—I was, to my amazement, still to be counted.

From time to time we shipped enormous seas and the water, pouring down the companion-way, flooded the passages through which we waded to our cabins. Then the rats became restive and showed themselves boldly. Hearing one evening most alarming sounds issuing from the cabin next my own, a beating and flapping, with shouts of "Ohé!" and "Holà!" the violent displacement of heavy objects and the smashing of glass, I rang for the stewardess.

"Is the ship on fire?" I enquired in alarm.

"*Mais non, madame,*" she said smiling at my fears. "*Ce n'est que la chasse aux rats!*"

In spite of this reassurance, I did not retire to my berth in an altogether happy frame of mind, and I was rather relieved than otherwise when, on the following day, the storm became

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so violent that the "survivors" decided not to go below for the night, but to sit up in the library.

I had made the acquaintance on board of a quiet American couple, my table neighbours, and we formed one of the groups that read or tried to talk through the long night hours.

The winds howled like a thousand demons about the little ship that tossed like a toy on the seas running mountains high ; green water poured continually over the library windows, and few of the passengers believed that we should weather the gale that continued to rage through still another day and night.

All agreed for a second time to wait up, and it was a jaded and miserable party that watched again, or dozed uneasily on the library sofas—even the volatile spirits of the one surviving Frenchman had lost their sparkle !

With Christmas Day, however, there came an improvement ; peace appropriately settled to a certain extent upon the waters, and one by one the invalids revived and crept up to face the light of day.

By a miracle I was blessed with perfect health throughout the crossing ; it was my seventh, but the first as well as the last upon which I enjoyed that delightful immunity from *mal de mer* !

In the course of that wild voyage I had also become possessed of an unruffled calm which

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was altogether foreign to my nature, and even the dark hours of the stormy nights found me quite unperturbed.

By what precise efforts of suggestion these things were brought about I could not say, but I knew that some very powerful influence was at work on my behalf and tried, in boundless gratitude, to aid as far as I was able, and not draw too heavily upon the resources of my benefactor.

Our ship reached Havre a day and night overdue and from a distance we could see the crowds that lined the quays awaiting her arrival. With joy and thanksgiving that storm-tossed company tumbled ashore into the arms of their expectant friends. Personally, I have never been more relieved to feel firm ground beneath my feet than at the end of that tempestuous voyage.

From Paris I wrote to Varshonyi telling him of my journey and safe arrival, and relating my surprising piece of news, the importance of which I believed that he, as a Catholic, would appreciate much more fully than I could. I told him also that I should be off in a few days, to the Tyrolese village where I proposed to take my *cure d'air et de repos*.

At the same time I wrote a few lines to Ferreira in Rome, to acknowledge his letter and his amiable offer received just before my departure—little realising how sinister the result of this act of civility would be !

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I arrived at my cure-resort on a clear and frosty afternoon and, after half-an-hour's search found and engaged two unpretentious rooms in a small, but very clean, *pension*, overlooking the promenade. As a sitting-room did not exist I had the unnecessary pieces removed from the bedroom next my own and a sofa and extra chairs brought in.

The régime I had to follow under the advice of a local doctor, was of the simplest description, and included the early rising and cold baths, to which I was not habitually addicted. An excellent military band began playing at eight o'clock every morning, and this was the fashionable hour on the promenade that I made an effort never to miss as the motley *défilé* of cure guests interested and amused me.

I had been a week in the Tyrol and was already experiencing the good effects of a regular life and long hours spent in the open air when I received a telegram from Varshonyi saying : " Must see you at once arrive to-night with good news."

I awaited his arrival with conceivable agitation. What good news could he bring me ? But he had scarcely arrived, looking very happy and animated, when he plunged into the subject of it.

" I was in Pest," he said, " when I got your letter, and travelled home at once to put the facts before the family. Our priest, who is an

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old personal friend, was present and we talked the whole matter over exhaustively. Have you any idea what it all comes to ? ”

“ Not the least,” I said surprised at his tone. “ What does it ‘ all come to ’ ? ”

“ To this ; that by the law of our Church, the only law we recognise, of course, where marriage is in question, you are *free* : your so-called marriage was never a marriage at all, and after a few slight formalities you could walk into any Catholic church in Europe and be married there.”

“ Is it possible ? ” I asked bewildered.

“ Quite possible,” he said, “ but you must become a Catholic—it is the condition upon which all depends. I fear you will not care to do it, as you hold so strongly to your own belief ; but we are met in that by a most serious obstacle. The subject of your *religion* was the first into which they enquired, and—you must forgive me—I forget exactly what you called it so I told them you were a *Buddhist*. Their consternation was quite funny to see ! But now that we are upon the subject tell me : were you ever baptised a—whatever you said you were ? ”

“ A ‘ Manichee ’ ? Oh, no,” I laughed, “ the cult, unhappily, is obsolete !

“ I am relieved to hear it,” he said smiling. “ But in that case do not raise an objection of sentiment and say that no matter what form your views take at present you will never consent

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to actually renounce the faith into which your parents gave you at your baptism."

"That objection," I said, "I really cannot raise for I have never been baptised."

"What!" he exclaimed, "*not at all?*"

"No," I repeated, "I was never baptised, nor my mother, who was reared a Boston Unitarian, before me, nor her mother before that. I never understood why, but I know that it was so."

"Better and better," he said. "And now tell me why you will not consent to become a Catholic. Not only our present happiness, but the security of our whole future hangs upon that. In our family, by the terms of the entail, if the heir does not marry a Catholic he forfeits the estates."

"But I consent, of course!" I said. "I once declared, it is true, that I would '*never*' become a Catholic to someone who predicted, in spite of it, that I was certainly destined to do so."

Varshonyi stopped on for a week at the hotel, and we took rambling walks about the country, talking of ourselves and of our plans.

"I cannot see," he told me one day, "why you should go back to America and bother about getting a divorce when in fact you are not married. Remain over here, have your documents sent out to you, and as soon as you have been baptised, we can be quietly married."

"But," I said, "there is a *civil* tie, recognised

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in the United States, which must be broken before I shall be free."

"Well, if it must," he said with a sigh, "but our Church knows nothing of *civil ties*; if it were not for that we could be married almost immediately."

It was therefore decided that, as soon as my cure was at an end, I should return to America and set at once about procuring my divorce. Before I left, however, I was to be brought together with a trusted elder member of the Varshonyi family; Béla desired this, and his people also, and Vienna was selected as the place of meeting, it being common ground for us both.

We had finally settled all the arrangements for this interview, and came in later than usual that afternoon to my little sitting-room. I was standing at the window, gazing out into the evening sky while Béla under the lamp consulted a time-table; there was a knock on the door at the farther end of the room, and as I had previously rung for wood, I called out, "*Herein!*" without looking round. I turned suddenly, however, at the sound of exclamations to see Ferreira standing in the doorway.

Even after the lapse of all these years I cannot bear to dwell upon the scene that followed. It must suffice to say that Béla considered himself insulted by the conduct and language of Ferreira ~~and~~ abandoned all self-control. Their altercation was of the most violent description, and

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it was some time before I could interpose ; when I was able to do so I begged the count to leave us and, white to the lips, he bowed slightly and obeyed.

Then I turned upon Ferreira, upbraiding him furiously for his intrusion, and the manner of it after his letter to me. But our dispute had scarcely begun when there was again a knock and Béla's servant—his former orderly—entered with a card, and the message that the count desired Mr. Ferreira, before leaving, to call on him at his hotel. Ferreira did not take the card from my hand and turned a shade paler as he said : “ This means a duel.”

“ It was to be expected,” I said. “ You provoked it—but it must never take place ! ”

I wrote a line to Varshonyi, begging him to come to the *pension*, and gave this to his servant, who waited, stiffly at attention, outside the door.

Then I fled downstairs to intercept Béla on his arrival and draw him into the reading-room, fortunately deserted at that hour.

Arrayed to my hand, in general, were many arguments against the practice of duelling, of which I strongly disapproved. But the scene through which I had just passed had taken me so utterly aback that I could think of no better plea to bring forward in this case than that duelling was no longer a custom of the United States, and Béla, therefore, had every advantage on *his* side. Not only in the experience gained

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in former encounters, but by being on his own territory, and younger, by many years than his adversary, whose sight was faulty and who was not, like himself, a trained shot and accomplished swordsman.

These circumstances, I thought, might influence Béla's decision, as I knew him to be of a just and generous nature.

"You must see that it is impossible for you to meet," I said at last. "It would be nothing short of murder!" But I spoke with the unhappy conviction of not having made my point.

I must have been talking for at least half an hour when Béla rose to take leave, and I was still wondering by what means I might finally persuade him, when he said quietly:

"All that you say is true, although I could not allow such arguments to weigh with me—as an *officer*, you know. But while we have been sitting here I have come to see that *for your sake* this duel must not take place. Your position in the affair makes it impossible—but this consideration alone, believe me, has led to my decision!" He raised my hand to his lips, with his perfect, old-world grace, caught up his hat and gloves and left the house.

I went heavily up the stairs, weak and trembling; the shock, and the sense of my responsibility, had broken my nerve completely. For had I not brought about this violent situation by the few lines, written to Ferreira on passing

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through Paris, in which I mentioned that I was on my way to "cure" in the Tyrol?

And in what bitter sorrow might I not have paid in lives to come if, once again, the shadow of this man's death had rested upon my spirit!

I opened the door of the sitting-room where, pale and silent, he awaited my return. "Varshonyi will not fight," I said, "the affair is settled. But go now—go in peace—and never let us meet again!" and sinking down on the sofa I buried my face in my hands and burst into a passion of tears.

Ferreira went to the door and out, without speaking, and so out of my life for ever.

One link in the chain binding me for centuries to an evil Karma—the sequence of acts committed in a long-forgotten past—snapped and fell away in that hour!

Was the Kā of the *Captive of Rank* appeased by the sacrifice of three golden years of youth, his sombre and implacable vengeance satisfied? I truly hoped that it might be so, for in paying this just, if heavy, debt, one long outstanding, I had lifted another burden from my own spirit.

Unhappy "Captive of Rank"—still a slave to false sentiment and the unworthy emotions! This mortal phase was not for him far brighter than one of the awful night-terrors, from which he suffered and waked so often, haggard and harassed.

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When I learned, several years later, that he had met a sad and lonely end, it was with the earnest hope that “after the fitful fever of this life” he might “sleep well,” and dream, on some happier plane, a dream of peace !

CHAPTER XII

WHEN my shaken nerves were somewhat restored, I went up to Vienna, where Béla was waiting to bring me together with his cousin.

Count Fodor proved to be a most delightful person—not at all old—and of most amiable and unaffected manners. I lost my heart to him at once, and although I cannot flatter myself that the sentiment was mutual, for he had certainly arrived with preconceived ideas, I thought he looked at me rather curiously as he entered, and if I did not misread the question of his glance it was : “ Is *this* the ‘scheming adventuress,’ this fair-haired woman dressed with such austere simplicity ? ”

After the conventional greetings had been exchanged, Count Fodor and I sat for a long hour talking together. When he left me I was glad to feel that any prejudice which might have existed against my own personality had been removed, and to know that upon my becoming a Catholic, the last objection to our union would be overcome.

Béla awaited his cousin's departure in the hotel hall below.

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" Well ? " he asked, as the two men met at the foot of the staircase.

" She's not at all as I expected ; why the deuce didn't you tell me she was *like that* ? "

" I thought you would prefer to find it out for yourself," said Béla, who smiled on learning from the other's tone precisely what he wished to know.

Next morning I started on my return journey to the Tyrol, and when I reached the *pension*, found awaiting me a batch of letters forwarded from Paris. One from papa, which appeared to have been written in haste, and some agitation, said : " Rumours likely to compromise your case are getting about. It is hinted that you have ' run away ' and some count, whose name I cannot catch, is being mentioned in the affair. You know enough about our press to realise that the nature of this gossip is not likely to become pleasanter when the reporters get hold of it. I have spoken with Blatchford (the solicitor) and he asked me to tell you that you ought to return *at once* and set about securing your divorce *without further delay*."

Another steamer of the Transatlantique Line, larger and more modern than the little ship on which I had made the outward journey, was advertised as sailing a few days later, and I found that by starting at once I could easily overtake it

Béla was still in Vienna as he intended to come

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up again for a few days before I left the Tyrol, but I telegraphed him that news from home obliged my immediate return, that I must sail on a certain date from Havre, and was writing.

Packing in haste, I set off and travelled through to Havre where I spent the night before the steamer sailed. Never wishing to be longer than necessary on board, I remained at the hotel until the last moment and reached the ship only a few minutes before she was timed to leave.

On the quay, as usual, all was confusion and frantic haste ; one figure alone, in perfect repose, stood waiting at the end of the gangway. This was a man in a huge greatcoat, with hands in pockets and fur collar turned well up above the ears ; as I came near I caught the gleam of a pair of grey-green eyes, and then the figure stepped forward, drew forth both hands and held them out to me !

“ Béla ! ” I cried, taken completely by surprise, and then : “ My dear ! Did you come all this long way to say good-bye to me ? ” And so unaccustomed had I become in my sad life to any show of affectionate consideration that I began to weep. “ All this long way to s-s-say good-bye,” I repeated tearfully.

“ Not at all,” said Béla calmly, quite unaffected by my sentimental mood. “ I telegraphed for a cabin. My things are on board ; I came to take you home.”

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Astonishment dried my tears. "You were an angel to think of it," I exclaimed; "but you don't mean it, of course!"

"Naturally, I mean it," he told me; "I don't like the idea of your travelling about alone in this way—it's not safe! Our ladies are not so independent."

"But this would be very incorrect! One of 'your ladies' would never dream of it, I am sure!"

"It is not at all sure," he said, with a twinkle. "And why 'incorrect'? What earthly harm would there be in it?"

"None, of course, but as I'm supposed to have 'run away' with you, imagine how people would talk."

"*'Honi soit qui mal y pense!'*" he said, with a shrug. "We must risk the 'talk'; I can't hear of your making the voyage alone—after the experience coming out. But there is one thing that I do wish you would bear in mind—as you always seem to me to forget it!—that we who are Catholics consider you *free*—not married at all—and if it were not wholly unprofitable, I should tell you what, as Catholics, we think of the circumstances by which you have been brought to a rather equivocal position."

As the circumstances passed in rapid array before my mind's eye, I felt strongly inclined to laugh at the thought that the *truth*—if truth were to be found in all this paradoxical affair—

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was not that I had run away, but that I was about to run home with the gentleman in question to obtain a divorce from the husband to whom I was not married !

I was just on the point of saying that the situation was rather unusual, when our conversation was interrupted by the sound of shouting voices—cries of “ Adieu ! ” and “ Good-bye ! ” as the gangway was lowered to the quay !

We dined very pleasantly together that evening and met later for a *tête-à-tête* in the library, the weather being fair, with seas only moderately high and our hopes bright for a delightful crossing.

It proved to be far otherwise, however : the wind shifted in the night, the seas rose, and Béla and I were not destined to meet again for days. I was desperately ill all the way over, and we only exchanged occasional notes by the hand of my stewardess !

When our ship drew alongside the Transatlantique dock—the same from which I had embarked only *five weeks* before—I caught sight of the kind face and sturdy figure of papa and made all haste ashore to greet him. As we stood exchanging the usual question Béla came to join us : “ I have brought your daughter home to her own country, Mr. Curtis,” he said, without waiting to be introduced ; “ she will tell you of the circumstances that led to my doing so, and I hope some time to have your

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permission to take her back again to my own." He held out his hand to me. "Good-bye," he said. "*Isten vele!*"¹ then bowing to my father, turned, and threading his way quickly through the crowd, was lost to view!

¹ Hungarian : "God be with you!"

CHAPTER XIII

I SHALL omit an account of the wearisome period spent in a western "*Divorce Court Town*."

It was a page torn out of life—as it shall be from this book !

If Prudence had not consented with great devotion to go with me, I doubt if I could have borne the ordeal to the end, for nine months elapsed before the civil tie was broken, and the decree restoring my legal freedom was, with all mock solemnity, pronounced.

I reached New York after the months of exile with the feeling of having lived apart from civilisation for years ! The roar of traffic in our noisy, stone-paved streets quite bewildered me, while in appearance I was likewise a perfect "country cousin," in a last year's coat and skirt, and a hat four seasons old !

I was overjoyed to be at home again and to see my adored Béla (who had recently come from abroad in anticipation of my arrival, and was looking wonderfully smart and handsome), but so anxious to avoid all unnecessary notice or notoriety that I scarcely dared venture into the streets, or into my favourite shops, and during

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the two months that followed neither entered a theatre nor attended a public entertainment of any kind.

I was occupied in bringing together a few documents required by the Church before our marriage could take place, and although these were easily obtainable, certain delays through distance, etc., unavoidably occurred.

Meanwhile, in connection with this matter, Béla and I paid several visits to the Archbishop, who was interested in our case and exceedingly kind to us. As I had been received in baptism into the Roman Church while still in the west, he administered to me personally one morning, at the back of the high altar in the great cathedral, the sacrament of confirmation. Later, when the essential documents were in order, he fixed the date and place of our wedding, selecting the day and the Church of St. Stephen.

As St. Stephen's day falls in Christmas week, we found the church still charmingly decorated with palms and evergreen garlands. Morning Mass was just over when we entered punctually at twelve o'clock, and a number of persons, moved by curiosity at sight of the wedding party, lingered to see us married. The impressive Catholic marriage service was quickly read, a canon stepped forward to give the arch-episcopal blessing, and the ceremony was at an end—Splendira and I were man and wife once more !

We sailed two days after our marriage, and

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during the following months roamed about the Continent, avoiding rather than seeking the society of our fellow-beings, and as happy and care-free as children wandering hand-in-hand through a vast garden.

It was in the course of a summer day's jaunt in Switzerland that we came, half by chance, to a famous mountain shrine, and mingling with the other pilgrims, made our way into the dim and scented atmosphere of the church to stand before the greatly venerated Black Virgin of Einseidln.

What train of old association stirred my soul at sight of that dark-faced image holding the black infant in its arms? I should have been puzzled to explain. Did I look back across the ages to see again Isis clasping the infant Horus to her breast! I cannot say, but I was moved to exclaim: "I must offer candles to Mary Mother and make a wish!"

Béla smiled at the suddenness of this devotional impulse, and the unusual expression, but observing my earnestness answered only: "Very well, if you will," and came out with me to a nearby booth where I bought two large candles, elaborately decorated in red and gold.

Returning to the church I set my candles alight, and having fixed them in place amongst dozens of others went again to stand before the Lady of Einseidln, and raising my clasped hands, confided to her in thought my wish—the dearest of my heart.

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Papa, who had come from America to share our happy rambling life for a few weeks, now rejoined us with the guide, and after making the tour of the church we all passed out to the cobbled space before it, and were hurrying off in the direction of the hotel when the guide, halting before a small doorway, asked : " Will you kindly sign your names ? We keep the visitors' book above here—up this stairway, please."

We mounted the stairs hurriedly to a rather dark room where the visitors' book lay on a shelf near the door : our names were signed, and I was turning to leave when the white-robed figure, subject of a large oil-painting of doubtful merit hanging on the adjacent wall, caught my eye through the gloom and I paused to ask the guide : " Of whom is that a portrait ? "

" Of the late Pope, Pio Nono," he replied.

Béla, who lingered over the visitors' book, glancing back through the pages, now came to my side. " Who is it ? " he asked.

" The late Pope, Pio Nono," I repeated.

" Oh, is that he ? " said Béla, observing the portrait with interest as he spoke of the Pope as man, his life and fortunes, and of certain rather personal traits.

" How did you happen to know all this ? " I finally inquired, surprised at the extent of his information.

" I've often heard these things," he said carelessly ; " they're traditional, I suppose. Several

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members and connections of our family were in the Church : two were bishops in his time. One, who later became a cardinal, if I remember, was the secretary and intimate friend of Pio Nono."

"WHO—What did you say ? " I exclaimed in such a tone and manner as again to move my husband to laughter.

" I said ' friend of Pio Nono '—what is there so very extraordinary in that ? But," he continued, glancing at his watch, " we mustn't hang about here ; we have a long drive before us—come on ! " and we ran downstairs to join papa, who waited, smoking a cigarette, in the doorway below.

If my heart held a wish very nearly as dear as that which I had confided to the Lady of Einseidl, it was that I might finally persuade my husband to share the beliefs that coloured all my thoughts, and were so closely associated with the circumstances of our two lives. I felt that until I had accomplished this we should never attain to the high ideal of confidence and mutual comprehension of which I dreamed.

At the time, however, of our visit to Einseidl, I had not approached the point of speaking freely of my extraordinary experiences, and it was only a long time after that I finally told him the story of " the Friend of Pio Nono."

Midsummer found us tired of constant travel, of crowded hotels and continental watering-places, and longing for a bracing whiff of the

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sea. We pushed on to England, therefore, intending to spend the few remaining weeks of summer there, and enjoyed our visit so much that when the time came to make plans for further travels we were unwilling to depart, and decided instead to take a house and stay on for a time.

Then two years went quickly by. We lived our own life quietly, apart from the world as before, sometimes in London and again near the sea, and there, at last, in the dawn of an August morning, while thrushes sang outside my open windows, my prayer to the Black Virgin of Einseidln was answered, and Mena, the dearly-beloved, my joyous and beautiful darling, was given back to me !

We lingered in England until our boy was nearly one year old, a golden-and-rosy vision of baby loveliness, and then filled with a new sense of responsibility, we said : “ We cannot now resume our roving life ; we must take the boy to his own country and make a home for him there.”

In distant Hungary there stood on the estate where my husband lived before our marriage a quaint old house, a family possession for three centuries, and previously, as its name still indicates, the favourite hunting lodge of certain sporting abbots—this, after the necessary renovation, became our home.

CHAPTER XIV

WE had been settled for seven happy summers in the old, rambling yellow house before I was inspired, on a rainy August afternoon, to turn out the contents of the writing bureau that stood in my little boudoir. The drawers were packed with a miscellaneous collection of articles—keepsakes, letters and old photographs, accumulated during my earlier years ; for the marquetry desk was a shrine to old memories, and contained all the objects of veneration brought from America to my new home, and there stored away safely, to lie untouched until that hour.

I went carefully through the contents of the first two drawers, and was lost to the world in meditation, sad or sentimental, for an hour or more, before my task was accomplished. Then I pulled the last drawer out on to the floor, and seated myself before it. This was the deepest and heaviest, and contained my letters and papers.

“ I never can read through all those letters,” I thought as I surveyed the mass. “ I have half a mind to destroy them, and yet ”—I began to finger the little parcels and turn them over

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regretfully—" I really hate to part with them. What shall I do ? "

But here, beneath the letters, lies a brown bundle of shabby copy-books and an old magazine. What are these ? I took them out, and as I unwound the faded ribbon that tied them, several loose sheets, closely written over with bold black handwriting, were shaken from their place between the pages of a copybook and fell into my lap. I picked one sheet up and read in printed letters at the top, " Tuxedo Club Complaint Form," and as I glanced down the page, " My name is only this, Sundra." The Story of Sundra ; of that strange and fascinating personality, the mystery of whose identity I had never solved, although not for want of thought and patient search at every likely source. I knew the story well by heart—had never forgotten a single word of it—yet I wished to re-read it for the pleasure I felt at sight of the bold handwriting.

I looked for the other sheets, and placing them in order began to read : " My name is only this, Sundra, for Mabel my mother was an Indian woman of the people." My eyes travelled no further and my heart gave a bound in the surprise of a sudden and dreadful shock ! " Mabel my mother "—there was no pause, nor point of punctuation here. Why had I always imagined one to follow the modern Christian name by which I was addressed ? The name was not here inserted as a form of address at all,

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for the sentence clearly read : “ Mabel my mother was an Indian woman of the people.” Could *I* have been that miserable half-caste—God, could it be ?

It was long since I had tried to “ write ” ; absorbed in the various occupations of my happy life I had allowed the intervals to become longer and longer, but now the drawer was thrust aside and on my knees before the desk I seized pencil and paper, and thus apostrophised the Unseen. “ Oh, tell me, tell me, someone, have I read the riddle at last ? Was *I* that wretch—that murderous wanton ? ”

“ Yes,” The answer, neatly written, was quick and decisive.

“ My ‘ Patient Scribe,’ are you still near ? Oh, you who never failed me, why did you not tell me long ago ? ”

“ I bade you *read*.”

“ Yes, but I was blind—I could not see ! And how can I, even now, believe that I should have tried to drown a helpless child ? It is horrible—horrible ! ” And with head bowed upon my folded arms I wept tears of blood, wrung from my very heart, at thought of that awful deed.

The gloom of the past then cleared before my sight and I knew at last why I had forfeited the crown of womanhood and suffered the unutterable sorrow of childlessness through many lives, through all this life, until Sundra, the abandoned son, and now high adept, summoned

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by the desperate cry of a mother-love long denied, swept aside the veil and came forth, visible, to rescue one who once cast him out to perish, and to reunite her, by long and patient effort, with those whom her soul loved.

That night I could not sleep, and creeping out to the old marquetry desk I begged the Scribe to draw near and tell me all the story. It was not, however, his custom to write at length, and he made answer briefly: "You may ask."

For hours I plied him with questions that carried us far back of the tragic incidents of my short Indian life into the realms of a strange and more remote past. Then, when the last link was forged, the chain complete, and the light of an August dawn crept in to extinguish the flare of a guttering candle, the lesson was brought to an end, my pen trailed wearily across the page to fall from nerveless fingers—and my power to "write" was gone!

My Patient Scribe and long-tried friend, did any tie beside that of cold *duty* bind you and me? I often wondered, for although you were so faithful and devoted always, you did not love me—and I knew it!

Now, I believe that I have recognised you, and I understand—your very want of sympathy has given me a clue. Were you not that *Amra* who reared and cherished the forsaken child, laid by his mother on the shore of the Ganges? Did not the woman's act cause in your father's

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heart such a violent antipathy that through all the centuries you could not overcome it ?

Was there, perhaps, from the first, the faintest tinge of *jealousy* mingled with your deep affection for the child ? Did you, who so nobly bore the parent's part, grieve to share the love of his pure spirit with the half-remembered girl-mother, for whose embrace the little one still longed ?

I know that later, when you saw your wonder-child, your more than son, watching with wistful dreamy eyes the other children of his age, caught up in play, or running for comfort in some childish sorrow, to the embrace of tender arms, you said no word. Even when he asked you " why he did not have his mother, too, like other boys," you were too noble to tell him of the half-caste girl who laid her bastard princeling by the shore—and yet this longing of his childish heart must have rankled, just a little, I am sure !

When at last, through tests and trials, by long and desperate endeavour, his place in the High Brotherhood was won, did you, who knew his noble charity of purpose—heritage from a princely father !—wonder that, since he was now free in spirit to roam the Universe at will, he chose to linger here upon this little globe, in search of the soul of his Indian mother, who, out of her own heart, all unknowingly endowed her love-child with a mighty talisman—the jewel *Love*—by which alone he worked his miracles ?

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Amra—for so I call you—who will not speak your hidden name ! You thought intervention in my fate uncalled-for, that Sundra should strike the karmic fetters from my soul all undeserved. I tell you NO ! for have I not, in this enduring, filial love ever clinging about me, subtle and penetrating like the fragrance of some hidden Eastern flower, won back at last (as did Ahalya in your Indian tale) my long-lost humanity ?

And was I not left in your charge by one dear to us both, until my eyes should be opened, that you might witness my true penitence and forgive ? Forgive, not only to lift the burden of your long displeasure from my spirit, but to clear a last stain from your own, that you might thus become free to follow your pupil and your Master to another and a brighter world ?

These questions, Amra, you will never answer, for you have passed beyond my call !

.

As I write these lines beneath the trees that shade a tangled garden in this far half-eastern land I see before me, bending over the pages of a book, the luminous face of my old Egyptian vision, grown more mature, but still undimmed in beauty ; and seated not far away upon the grass, the golden-haired dream-child twines a chain of flowers.

Our three destinies are here seen reunited by the devoted efforts of one whose name, despite

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the closeness of our early tie, is still unknown to me—he who was born to my arms beneath the sundari trees—lulled by the sighing of the wind amongst their branches.

Sometimes when I look up from my writing to watch the sturdy figure of my little son flitting amongst the wild flowers to which he gives so personal a love, and which for his sake here spring unchecked by man's destructiveness, I am moved to picture the circumstances of that other childhood. In fancy I see the form of a dark-eyed, delicate-limbed Indian boy, half-starved and all unclad, setting forth from the poor place he called his home upon the heart-breaking journey across the Himalayas, supporting with his slight strength the shrunken form of an old man, at once his father, his mother and his all, who was making a last effort of love for the child in the attempt to bear him, ere his own release from age and suffering, to the care of one who would rear him in those studies to which he knew the boy, by nature, to be especially predestined.

In fancy I try to follow them some way upon the journey and my heart grows heavy at thought of the horrors and the hardships of it to the feeble old man and the young and sensitive child.

Long days of climbing, exhausting to their common weakness, amid biting wind and bitter cold, with precarious nourishment and scanty clothing and no better hope of a resting-place for their weary limbs at night than the bare

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floor of a rocky cave. Added to this the dread, borne equally, no doubt, if only in dumb, chill fear by the child, that the strength of the old man might not suffice, despite his will, to bear him to the end, the soul of Amra be parted from its frail tenement before they reached their destination, and the child left alone to his fate amid the desolation of Himalayan heights.

Tears rise to my eyes, but do not fall, for a little hand thrusts poppies into mine : a child's voice asks : " Mother, why are you sad ? "

I answer : " Because I am thinking of the past."

" But why," persists the childish voice, " do you think about it if it makes you sad ? "

And I, too, ask myself : Why now repine for the fate of one helped to early wisdom by early lessons of suffering and hardship, by the consistent efforts of spiritual and physical endurance, of which the Himalayan journey may be taken almost as a symbol, to attain the far, unfrequented heights of perfect understanding !

Often at the close of clear, bright, summer days, in the cool of early evening hours, I desert my favourite seat near the old yellow house, and leaving it behind me stroll down the lime-tree walk to greet the evening star. It can be seen from the end, above the trees, shining serenely in the fading glory of the sky, and to the accomplishment of this rite I go clad in white, with flower-wreathed garden hat, and leading by the hand a little lad about nine years old.

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The ALL-Mother wears her fairest aspect on these summer evenings and brightest jewel in her diadem is Venus, star of Love.

Mena and I come to give praise and make obeisance.

Then, as we stand hand-in-hand, gazing out together into the blue immensity of sky that spans the breadth of this gently undulating country, my little companion, unconsciously moved by the tranquil beauty of the scene, suddenly asks me: "Mother, where is Heaven?"

"There!" I tell him, pointing to the lovely star of evening; "there, or in other stars, ~~older than~~ ours—more advanced in knowledge."

"But Miss says," he answers, turning clear, earnest eyes up to the blue, "that Heaven is in the sky and there are beautiful Golden Gates!"

"And we are looking through the beautiful Golden Gates of the sunset at this very moment upon God's Heavens—His shining stars, or mansions in the sky."

"But how shall we ever get to them?" asks the child. "Of course—I know! We're going to have *wings*!"

"Of course we are," I tell him. "Not the great feathery wings of monstrous birds, but wings light and invisible, created of our own ~~faith~~ and made strong by the will to rise; and every effort to be good or kind, to overcome a temptation or an evil temper, strengthens the fabric of those wings upon which we are to rise

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at last to 'Heaven'—to that one of God's stars, or 'mansions,' which is next in order above our own."

"But mother dear," says the little boy, "Miss doesn't tell it a bit like this—how do you know these things?"

"I know because the friend and Master of whom I have often spoken to you—he who was a Wise man from the East—once told me all these things."

Then many questions follow about my friend and Master in whom he is deeply interested, having once discerned while gazing in my face as we talked of him that I was moved.

"You *liked* him!" he had then announced accusingly, and with a faint note of jealous anxiety in his voice; "I see that you loved him!"

"Yes," I ventured to admit.

"Where is he now?"

"Gone away to 'Heaven,' dearest—to another star."

"And do you think he's gone to that bright one there?"—as we again turn our eyes upon lovely Venus.

Alas, I do not know; I often ask myself as we stand here hand-in-hand to gaze out upon the stars, in which of all those "Heavens" he may be now, and I wonder, too, if it can be in that bright one there, to which we nightly turn our thoughts as it rises, shining divinely, above the trees of our old lime avenue.

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And does he, too, go forth at eventide to stand on some great terrace overlooking the spheres, and knowing well our fate and our abode direct his love toward us? Do our thoughts meet and pass by in the blue ether, I wonder, and are the vibrations of a love and gratitude without limit strong enough to reach him in another star?

.

The tale, my dears, is told, but that you may never misunderstand my motive in relating it I will, ere writing *finis*, add yet a few words.

My intention was not to interest or amuse you with a story of certain phases of the earthly lives of the two souls who have more than once borne toward you the relation of parents, but to lead you into the Way of Truth, for "Truth is the beginning and end of existence—without Truth there is no existence."¹

And I must utter a word of warning also, for I would never have you engage in such work as I have here described without some very strong incentive. *Grave risks attend an aimless dabbling in Spiritualism and the result is sometimes madness or death.*

My wish for you is that you may stand by your own strength—become the Positive agents, ~~not~~ the Negative. Cultivate your *will*, therefore, and study so to develop and direct the occult powers within yourselves that you may

¹ Confucius.

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dominate and guide your weaker brethren for their good and thus bear your part in the work of progress.

Go forth, my sons, to conquer or to serve, as heroes went in ancient lay and legend—your elder points the way !

There are dragons in the Path which must be slain if you would carry help to those who suffer bewitchment through their baser senses or languish in the darkness of unbelief, but victory is, and ever will be, to the strong ; press onward, then, and upward, sword in hand—for by the sword you may attain the stars !

FINIS

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